

THE
PURPLE
ROBE

JOSEPH
HOCKING

R. S. Lead

THE PURPLE ROBE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ALL MEN ARE LIARS
FIELDS OF FAIR RENOWN
ISHMAEL PENGELLY
THE STORY OF ANDREW FAIRFAX
JABEZ EASTERBROOK
THE MONK OF MARSABA
ZILLAH : A ROMANCE
WEAPONS OF MYSTERY
THE BIRTHRIGHT : A ROMANCE
AND SHALL TRELA WNEY DIE ?
THE SCARLET WOMAN
LEST WE FORGET
GREATER LOVE
ESAU
THE COMING OF THE KING
ROGER TREWINION
MISTRESS NANCY MOLESWORTH

THE PURPLE ROBE

BY

JOSEPH HOCKING

AUTHOR OF "ALL MEN ARE LIARS," "ANDREW FAIRFAX,"
"THE SCARLET WOMAN," ETC., ETC.

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CONTENTS



CHAP	PAGE
I. WHY ALIZON NEVILLE WENT TO TUDOR CHAPEL .	9
II. HOW DUNCAN RUTLAND MET ALIZON NEVILLE .	18
III. WHY DUNCAN CHALLENGED FATHER SHEEN TO A PUBLIC DEBATE	27
IV. HOW DUNCAN'S LETTER AFFECTED FATHER SHEEN .	39
V. A TOURNAMENT OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY .	48
VI. ALIZON NEVILLE'S DILEMMA	59
VII. THE SCENE AT BOGGART'S CLOUGH	69
VIII. DUNCAN RUTLAND'S VICTORY	77
IX. THE COMING OF FATHER RITZOOM	88
X. FATHER RITZOOM'S PLANS	99
XI. AT THE PRIORY	108
XII. THE FIRST LINK IN THE CHAIN	117
XIII. THE BEGINNING OF THE STRUGGLE	128
XIV. HOW DUNCAN RUTLAND'S EYES WERE OPENED .	140
XV. "MAN PROPOSES, BUT GOD DISPOSES"	150
XVI. RUTLAND'S CONFESSION	161
XVII. IDEAL CATHOLICISM	170

CHAP.	PAGE
XVIII. THE MAN AND THE WOMAN	184
XIX. "ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME"	200
XX. THE HOME OF THE PAPACY	211
XXI. WHAT ALIZON AND DUNCAN SAW AT ST. PETER'S .	222
XXII. THE OPINIONS OF THOSE IN HIGH PLACES . .	234
XXIII. WITHIN THE VATICAN	246
XXIV. THE BAMBINO	258
XXV. HOW THE BAMBINO CURED LADY NEVILLE . .	270
XXVI. SIGHT-SEEING	282
XXVII. HOW RUTLAND AND ALIZON SAW THE POPE OF ROME	293
XXVIII. HOW ALIZON RECEIVED RUTLAND'S CONFESSION .	305
XXIX. AFTERWARDS	313
XXX. HOW LADY NEVILLE RECEIVED THE NEWS . .	320
XXXI. DUNCAN'S FIRST LOVE-LETTER	331
XXXII. FATHER RITZOOM DELIBERATES	342
XXXIII. THE PRIEST AND THE WOMAN	351
XXXIV. RUTLAND'S HOME-COMING	361
XXXV. DUNCAN RUTLAND'S TEMPTATION	372
XXXVI. GOD, THE MAN AND THE WOMAN	379

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CHAPTER I

WHY ALIZON NEVILLE WENT TO TUDOR CHAPEL

THE Story of the Garden of Eden is said to explain one of the greatest mysteries of life ; it does more than that, it reveals one of the most striking traits in human nature. No sooner did Eve know that certain fruit was forbidden than she longed for it. All of us long for forbidden fruit, no matter what our nationality or education may be. "Stolen grapes are sweet," says the old adage, and many of the old adages are true.

This may explain why Alizon Neville, of Neville Priory, desired to enter a Nonconformist Church. Had she been free to do as she liked about the matter, the possibilities are that she would not have had the faintest inclination in this direction ; but being a Roman Catholic, as her forefathers had been for many generations, she had been led to regard worship within unconsecrated walls as a species of blasphemy. Hence the desire to take part in a Protestant service. Of course, this feeling only sprung from curiosity, for she was in no way dissatisfied with her own Church ; indeed, she regarded it as the only Church,

and had a proper feeling of pity for those who did not belong to her communion. Nevertheless, the fact that she had been led to regard the worship of Protestants as utterly wrong, and, for a Catholic, sinful, prompted her to look with curious eyes towards Tudor Chapel, which was situated in the centre of Lynford, a large manufacturing Lancashire town.

In the carriage opposite her sat an elderly man, who, by his attire, was evidently a Roman Catholic priest. He was a mild, kind-looking man, one who apparently took life easily, and troubled little about the problems of the world. He prided himself upon being a good orthodox Catholic, who did the work of a parish priest faithfully, and accepted without question what the councils of the Church had decided upon. In this way he saved himself a great deal of trouble.

"Mother is a long time, Father Sheen," said Alizon presently; "if I had known I should have gone with her."

"Her ladyship is a keen lawyer herself," replied the priest with a slight Irish accent, "thus, when she gets talking with a lawyer, the time passes quickly with her."

Alizon laughed gaily. She was a pleasant-looking girl, with frank, open countenance, and dark, mischievous eyes. She was tall, and well-developed too, and the dress she wore set off her fine figure admirably.

"These Protestants build costly chapels," she said, looking towards a huge building over the doors of which, and carved deeply into the stones, were the words—

TUDOR CHAPEL.

Father Sheen nodded his head gravely.

"Have you ever been inside one?" asked the girl.

"Yes. Never to their services, of course."

"What are they like?"

"Oh, very much like an ordinary hall."

"But you know nothing about—about, what they do there?"

"No."

"I should like to go," said the girl.

"My child!" said the old man reprovingly.

"Oh, only to see, of course. I have never been inside one of their buildings. What sect does Tudor Chapel belong to?"

"I don't know," replied Father Sheen. "They are much the same, all these Protestant sects. They multiply like insects. Some one quarrels with some one else, about some point of doctrine of which they know nothing, a split follows, and then a new Bethel springs up. They are a mere rope of sand—these Protestants."

"Do you know the minister?"

"No. I have heard that a new one is just coming. Look, there is a placard announcing something about it."

The girl looked in the direction towards which the priest pointed, and read a bill, which announced that the Rev. Duncan Rutland, M.A., would commence his ministry at Tudor Chapel on the following Sunday, and that a meeting welcoming him as minister of the church would be held on Monday evening.

When the girl had finished reading, she turned to a lady who was just entering the carriage.

"You have been a long time, mother," she said. "If you had stayed much longer, Father Sheen and I would have engaged in a theological argument."

The old priest laughed good-humouredly. He was Alizon's confessor, and had known her all her life. Moreover, he often acted as chaplain at the Priory, and had been a friend of the Neville family for many years.

A few seconds later the carriage rolled through the smoky streets of Lynford. The operatives were just leaving the cotton factories, for it was half-past five in the afternoon. The time, however, was early September, and the day being fine, the hood of the carriage was thrown back so that they might enjoy the little sunshine which filtered its way through the clouds of soot and smoke.

Lady Mary Neville and Alizon sat side by side, while Father Sheen sat opposite to them. The Neville family occupied a high position in the neighbourhood, indeed, it was famous long before the town began to be. Like many another Lancashire industrial centre, Lynford was of recent growth, dating, indeed, only from the introduction of machinery in the district; but the Neville family was several hundred years old. At the time of the dissolution of Monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII., the Nevilles had secured the old Priory in which to live. They had secreted priests there in the time of Elizabeth, they fought against the Roundheads in the days of Charles I. Later still, when James II. tried to bring back the Romanist faith, the family defended him against William of Orange, and when the Young Pretender marched from Scotland towards Derby in 1745, a young Colonel Neville joined his ranks, and was afterwards distinguished by being beheaded, the head being placed on a pike and lifted on high at Temple Bar. Indeed, this branch of the Neville family had remained true to the ancient faith for many centuries, and at the time of which I write, Lady Neville was the representative of one of the very few important families in Lancashire which yielded allegiance to Rome. She was, moreover, a widow with only one child, Alizon, who sat by her side. In spite of her wealth and position, however, no homage was paid to her. The Lancashire operatives pay homage to no one. Mostly they regard the politeness

which characterises the Southern peasant as servility, and the Lancashire man, in the ordinary sense of the word, is never servile. Still, the men and women who filled the streets as they passed, nudged each other and said—

“Yon’s a gradely lass.”

“Yi, Alizon’s noan so bad,” would be the reply.

Neville Priory was a fine old pile standing some distance from the town of Lynford, and Alizon loved her home. Throughout her life she had been surrounded by pure influences, and except in matters of religion, she had been allowed to act and think pretty much as she pleased. She was trustful and loving, quick of temper, and somewhat wilful, but a true, wholesome girl nevertheless. She had read a good deal on certain prescribed lines, was a fair musician, and spoke several modern languages fluently.

“You will stay and dine with us, Father Sheen,” said Lady Neville, as the carriage drew up to the Priory door.

The priest murmured his acceptance, and entered the house with a satisfied air.

“I wish it weren’t Friday,” thought Alizon, “I do hate Fridays’ dinners. What’s the good of it, I wonder?”

Presently the dinner-bell sounded, and the three sat down to the dinner-table.

“Father Sheen,” asked Alizon, “why is it a sin to pray in a Protestant Chapel?”

“Because by so doing you encourage heresy, my child; because, in a way, you deepen the wound made at the so-called Reformation, and you recognise in a fashion the position of a Protestant minister.”

The girl nodded her head, and was silent for a few minutes, then she went on—

“But it would not be a sin to go to one of their meetings if you did not pray, nor in any way join in what they do?”

“No, not sin, but I think it would be unwise.”

"Why, Father Sheen?"

"Because, unless you are careful, the seeds of doubt may be sown."

"I see; but if one went loving the Church, and determined to resist Protestant influences, it would not be sin?"

"No, in that case it would not be *sin*," and the priest emphasised the word.

Alizon asked no more questions, but sat quietly throughout the dinner. Presently, when alone in her room, however, she thought over what the priest had said.

"Yes," she said to herself, "I'll go. No one need know anything about it. I'll wear a thick veil, and slip in at the back part of the chapel."

She found it impossible to go on the Sunday, but on the Monday evening she left the Priory alone. It was half-past eight o'clock when she reached Tudor Chapel, and daylight being gone, she was able to get into the vestibule without attracting any attention. Here her heart almost failed her, for, strange as it may seem to Protestant ears, this young Catholic girl felt, in spite of the priest's words, that the step she was taking would be counted to her as sinful. She was about to turn back when a grey-haired old weaver came towards her. Evidently he did not recognise her through her thick veil.

"Want a seat, lass?" he asked in a friendly way.

"Yes," she answered.

"Come along, then."

"I shall have to come out soon. I want a seat as near the door as possible."

"Yi," said the old man. "Come in to Mester Ashton's pew, there's nobody there."

He accordingly opened the door, and showed her into a richly-furnished pew, at the extreme back of the building.

"You'll be just in time to hear Mester Rutland," he

whispered confidentially. "Th' owd Matthy Bray is just a windin' up ; after he's finished ther'll be th' Alleluia Chorus, and then Mester Rutland."

Alizon found herself comfortably seated where she could see the entire building, and yet be unnoticed herself. She saw that the chapel was handsomely decorated, and that several hundred people had gathered together.

"I wonder why all these people stay outside the Church?" she asked herself. "From what one can see, the folk who come here are intelligent, thrifty, respectable people. Most of the Catholics of the town are Irish, and they are poor and thriftless."

She did not hear much of what the old man who stood on the rostrum was saying. She had a vague impression that there was a certain free and easy atmosphere in the meeting, and the fact that the people clapped their hands and laughed, confirmed her in her belief that the people were not religious as she understood the word.

Presently the Hallelujah Chorus was sung. It was heartily and correctly rendered, but the singing in her own church was far more to her taste. So far there was little to interest her. When the singing ceased, however, she saw that the congregation settled itself to listen attentively, and that to many the real interest of the meeting had commenced.

The chairman, a strong, tall, typical Lancashire man, in a few words introduced the new minister. "We sampled him pretty well yesterday," he said, "and most on us thought that he preached two rare sermons. Some of the lads and lasses said, 'he wur champion'; well, to-night we are here to welcome him, and now I hope you'll give a hearty cheer for the Rev. Duncan Rutland."

Alizon looked eagerly towards the rostrum, and saw a young man rise. He wore no clerical attire, and might as

readily have been taken for a lawyer or a doctor, as a minister. He appeared to be about twenty-six years of age, was rather pale, but otherwise gave evidence of being strong and vigorous.

The moment he rose to his feet Alizon felt that he was no ordinary man ; before he had been speaking three minutes he had riveted her attention. Perhaps it was because the address was so entirely different from what she had been accustomed to hear. It was really an appeal to young men and maidens to be true to their great heritage. He came there, he said, as an ambassador of God, to preach a great gospel. Our fathers had struggled to give us freedom, freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, and that now, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, there was a danger of our young men and women losing their hold upon those principles which had made the nation great and mighty.

Doubtless, a critical mind would have discovered much to find fault with in the speech. It was the utterance of a young man, and not weighted by the experience of years, or the wisdom which is supposed to come with grey hairs. Nevertheless, it was a thoughtful, stirring address, and to Alizon it came with singular force. It enforced as a duty that which she had been taught to regard as sinful. It taught that it was her duty to think for herself, to shape her own creed, to read the Bible for herself, and to find out its teaching. It warned her against accepting what any council or Church might teach, simply because that council or Church had taught it. It exhorted her to judge her creed at the bar of reason, of revelation, of history, of experience, and of her soul's deepest needs.

To Protestant ears this was, of course, commonplace ; to Alizon it was a plausible kind of infidelity. And yet she was impressed. The surroundings were strange, the

atmosphere was new to her, while the man who spoke possessed a kind of magnetism. To her, moreover, he was a dangerous man ; his evident sincerity and earnestness were dangerous, while the fact that in every sentence he revealed that he was a student and a scholar fascinated her. She had been brought up with the idea that all Nonconformist Protestants were ignorant, Bible-worshipping fanatics. Of course, this young minister was utterly wrong, and doubtless Father Sheen could prove how lamentably false and dangerous all these, to her, heretical statements were ; but at that moment she felt carried away by his fervour, and in spite of herself, he made her mental sky higher, and her horizon broader.

As soon as the young minister had concluded his address, she rushed out. "I'll never go into one of those places again," she said ; "no wonder Father Sheen says that Protestant Chapels are dangerous."

When she neared her home she slackened her pace. "I'll have to tell him, I suppose," she said ; "perhaps I shall be able to persuade him to answer this dangerous address. I am afraid I've done very wrong."

What I have written in this chapter may seem of but little importance ; nevertheless, this incident commenced anew the history of two people, a history that became almost tragic.

CHAPTER II

HOW DUNCAN RUTLAND MET ALIZON NEVILLE

DUNCAN RUTLAND was sitting alone in his lodgings. He had just finished his breakfast, when his landlady entered, bringing two newspapers. One was the *Manchester Guardian*, one of the most important papers in the North of England, the other was the *Lynford Observer*.

"Th' *Observer* 's bin a givin' it yo hot," remarked the woman.

"Oh!"

"Yi. Ther's a leadin' article abaat the speech yo made on Monday neet."

"I thought that was done with on Wednesday. The editor had a paragraph about it then, besides giving a full report."

"Well, ther's a leadin' article, and a letter from some Catholic or other."

Duncan did not reply, but taking the paper from his landlady, began to scan its pages. The leading article was supposed to be a judicial summing up of the statements made in his speech, and did not interest him much, but the letter which Mrs. Nutter had mentioned was a vigorous attack on the position he had assumed. Duncan paid but

little heed to it, however, and quietly went on with his work.

"Thou mus'n get cross with th' Catholics," remarked Mrs. Nutter as she left the room, "thou'll mak it warm for theesen if tha dost."

Duncan laughed.

"I've never said a word about them as yet," he said.

"But they tak it thet tha hast," replied Mrs. Nutter. "What they didn't like was baat th' Reformation."

"Were you at the meeting?"

"No, but I read the report in th' *Observer*. It wur fair and strong."

Duncan Rutland was the youngest minister who had ever taken charge of Tudor Chapel. From the Nonconformist standpoint, it was the principal church in the town, and the "leading men" of the place had been very anxious to secure "the right man." For some years the "Cause" had been somewhat languishing. The building was situated in the heart of the town, and as family after family removed further and further into the suburbs, the difficulty of keeping up the congregations became increasingly great. Several ministers had been "heard," but none seemed to suit, until one day a young student from a neighbouring college was invited to preach. He was not regarded as a candidate, for the simple reason that very little was known about him; besides the thought of inviting a lad of twenty-six to take charge of "Tudor," was out of the question. Accordingly he came to Lynford as an ordinary supply, and a very small congregation gathered to hear him. When the day's service was over, however, a unanimous desire was expressed to hear him again. A few weeks later he had accepted a call to the Church, to commence his ministry when his College course had ended.

He had taken his degree in Arts before leaving College

and had come to Lynford full of natural pride because of his success, and full of hope concerning his work at Tudor.

His first Sunday's sermons and his address on the Monday night had cost him a great deal of time and study, for he had determined to state in them the lines of his working and thinking during his ministry. I suppose all young ministers think they can mark out a course of action, and most of them have all sorts of hopes concerning the impression they will make, never dreaming that events may in a few weeks entirely revolutionise their plans. Duncan Rutland's course of reading during the past few months had led him to believe most strongly that priestcraft was an evil thing—that no man should in any way stand between a man's soul and his Maker, and that before any one could realise the Christianity of Christ he must himself fight out his faith on the solitary battlefield of his own soul. This fact had led him to make the statements which had somewhat startled Alizon Neville, and which had also caused a devoted Catholic to write to the *Lynford Observer*.

"It seems I am unintentionally stirring people up," thought Duncan, after he had been working for half an hour. "That Catholic asks me to substantiate my statements which were reported in the paper. Well, I will."

The next day Tudor Chapel was more than ordinarily well filled, and Duncan, with the impetuosity of a young man, proclaimed his message. He did not notice any reporters present, and did not anticipate that any special notice would be taken of his words.

"If thou'lt take warnin' from an owd man," said an old weaver to him at the close of the day's services, "thou'lt have nowt to do wi' newspaper discussions."

"I do not intend to," replied Duncan; "but what is your particular reason for saying this now?"

"For one reason thou'lt be makkin' thesen cheap," was

Matthy Bray's, the weaver's, answer ; " and for another, no good comes of it. Ya see ther's allus a lot o' chaps as wants to see ther names i' print."

" Why, do you think there will be a discussion in the papers ? "

" I do 'n' all."

" Why ? "

" Well, for one thing, although no names 'ave been mentioned, you've 'it the Cathlicks 'ard ; and nowadays they're longing to 'ave summat to say. They're ready for ony means to git noaticed."

" Are they strong in the town ? "

" Nobbut middlin', and they're mainly Irish. All the same, Lady Neville's a Cathlick. So's her lass."

" Her lass ? "

" I mean 'er daughter. They're big foaks here. Mind, I'm noan findin' fault. Thou'st praiched rare sermons to-day. But ther'll be a lot of talk, mind that. Thee keep from mentioning names, and keep from writin' to th' papers ; that's my advice."

The Wednesday's edition of the *Lynford Observer* contained several letters concerning Duncan's statements, for and against, and the young man, being new to the life of the town, was much interested.

For the next few Sundays he said nothing in his sermons concerning the questions discussed in the newspapers, nevertheless, they were flooded with correspondence. In a country town editors are glad when some question of local interest arises, and there are always a number of people who fancy they can throw light upon it. In a few weeks the young man was tired of it. There was very little instruction in what was written, and there was much personal abuse.

On the whole, he was fairly happy at Lynford. From

what he could see, the church would prosper under his ministry, and, although the town was by no means a pleasant place of residence, he took long journeys into the country, sometimes on his bicycle, and sometimes, when the roads were wet, on foot. There were very fine moors near him, and he enjoyed tramping across them. Before the winter had set in he knew the countryside thoroughly, and had learnt to appreciate the wild, bleak scenery of the district.

One day—it was early in November—he started for a long walk across the moors. It so happened that he was free from engagements for the day, and as he had spent much time in visiting and hard reading for a few days past, he determined to go farther afield than had been his wont. The morning opened beautifully. This was an unusual occurrence at this time of the year, for as a rule, between October and May there are but few fine days in that part of Lancashire which is devoted to manufacture. As a rule weavers hate bright, frosty days, the threads are constantly snapping, and as a consequence, there is a great deal of extra work, for less pay. Usually, the less work a weaver has to do in minding looms the better is the stuff manufactured, and the more money can he draw at the end of the week. Thus it is that he enjoys most those days when the air is humid, and when, as a consequence, the sky is dark and dreary.

On this morning, however, the sun shone brightly, the air was keen and frosty, and as he trudged along a well-worn footpath towards the wide moors, Duncan felt his nerves tingle with a delightful sense of enjoyment. He had been walking perhaps half an hour when he came to one of the lodge-gates of Neville Priory, where he saw a young girl on horseback. It was evident that those who lived at the lodge were neglecting their duty, for no one was there to

open the gate, and the girl was on the point of dismounting as Duncan came up.

"Excuse me," said the young man, "but will you allow me to assist you?" He opened the gate as he spoke, giving a side glance to the girl, who sat on a restive young horse.

She passed through, and then with a heightened colour, but with a bright smile, thanked him for his courtesy.

"What a bonnie girl!" thought Duncan, as she galloped away. He had hit upon the right adjective. She was bonnie. There in the bright winter sunshine, with the great leafless trees standing around, she looked a perfect picture of youth and health and beauty. He saw that her hair was dark brown, and her eyes were of the same colour, while her clear, dark skin, flushed with health and exercise, added charm to a face of rare beauty. Her movements on the horse were perfectly graceful too, and the young man had no doubt but that she was some one of distinction in the neighbourhood.

Up to the time of his coming to Lynford, Duncan had had no love affairs. It is true that while he was preparing for college he had fond fancies concerning a girl who lived in his native village; but he had never spoken to her concerning them, and on entering college at twenty years of age his mind had been too full of his studies for these fancies to ripen into love. During the six years of his college life, he had worked hard; indeed when, shortly after his arrival there, his Principal had told him that if he set his mind upon it, he could take his degree in Arts, in addition to passing his theological examinations, he resisted all temptations of social intercourse, and directed the whole of his energies towards study.

Thus, when he came to Lynford he was heart-whole. Not that he was averse to female society. No healthy-

mindful young man ever is, and although he had seen no one in Tudor Church who attracted him in the slightest degree, he hoped that at some time he should have a home of his own, and that some pure, good girl would become his wife.

The memory of this dark-eyed, brown-haired maid remained with him through the day, and the memory was pleasant. And if the truth must be told, he thought more about her than of the sermon he had intended to prepare for the coming Sunday.

About one o'clock he had called at a farmhouse where the farmer's wife had given him a cup of tea, and had, moreover, insisted that he should have some of the dinner she had prepared for her own family.

"Yo mus'n say noa, Mester Rutland," she insisted; "we're noan gran foak, but hot leg of mutton is better nor dry bread an a bit of 'am."

"How do you know who I am?" asked Duncan.

"Oh, we've 'eerd on ye. We 'ear as 'aa you're stirrin' up th' Cathlicks. Go at 'em, Mester, they'll never do no good."

"I've nothing against the Catholics," said the young man. "I've never said a word against them either."

"No, but yo've bin 'ard on priestcraft, and it's th' same thing. But be careful, Mester; they've been sayin' some rare 'ard things about yo."

"Indeed."

"Yi. They see as 'ow you've noan been sa mony years at College for nowt, and I've yerd as 'ow Father Sheen is goin' to answer yo in th' Cathlick Church. I reckon he's welcome?"

"Oh, quite welcome."

"Yi, I thought soa. But I wouldn't go aat after dark over mich, and ye'll 'ave to be lookin' to yer words. Lady

Neville 'ave got a rare lot o' books at th' Priory, and Father Sheen can 'ave as mony as he wants."

"That's all right."

"I know yo're noan afeard, and yo need'na be. Father Sheen's noan the gift of gab yo've got. I've yerd yo' boath."

"Oh!"

"Yi. I wur at Tudor on Sunday neet."

"Why, it's several miles from here."

"Yi, but we don't mind a few miles to hear summat good. There, aar James William is comin' in. 'Appen you smoak a bit."

"Sometimes."

"Well, aar James William 'll be glad to 'ave a pipe with yo'."

It was after three o'clock when Duncan left the hospitable farmer and his wife, and by this time the sunshine had gone, and heavy mist had settled upon the moors. Still, the young man knew his way, and, in spite of the gathering darkness, enjoyed his walk homewards.

Presently he came to a stile, at which he stopped. "I think I'll try the footpath," he said, "it's later than I thought, and I shall cut off a mile or two."

He accordingly tramped across some fields until he came to a farmhouse. By this time it was dark, and the fact of the mist made the road difficult to find. Just as he came to the farm-gates, he heard women's voices. The one rather harsh and strident, the other sweet and girlish.

"I'm rare 'n sorry, Miss Alizon," he heard one say, "but th' trap's gone to Lynford and it'll noan be back for a long time."

"Oh, never mind, Mrs. Crossfield, I dare say I shall be able to find my way across the fields, and when I get into the main road I shall not mind. I never thought this fog would come on or I should never have ventured so far."

"Good-night," said Duncan, as he came up.

"Good-neet," said the farmer's wife, and she looked at him keenly.

"It's rather dark," ventured the young man. He had heard what had passed between them, and wondered how he could offer his services to Miss Alizon, whoever she might be, without intruding.

"It's rare and dark," replied the elder woman. "'Appen yo're goin' to Lynford?"

"Yes, I am," replied Duncan.

"'Appen yo' know the rooad weel."

"Yes, I know it very well," and he passed on. He heard the two speaking in low tones together, and then before he had proceeded far, the woman called him back.

"I say, felly."

"Yes," and he went towards them again.

"'Appen yo'll tell me wot they call yo'?"

"Certainly. My name is Duncan Rutland."

"Th' minister at Tudor?"

"Yes."

"Then 'appen yo'll walk wi' this young wooman as far as Boggart's Clough. Oo's a bit afeeard i' th' dark."

"If the young lady will allow me, I shall be pleased to accompany her so far," replied Duncan politely.

"Thank you," said the girl, "I shall be very glad if you will. Good-night, Mrs. Crossland."

"Good-neet, Miss Alizon."

CHAPTER III

WHY DUNCAN CHALLENGED FATHER SHEEN TO A PUBLIC DEBATE

"IT is very kind of you," said the girl, after they had gone a few yards together.

"I am glad I happened to be coming this way," said Duncan. "I hesitated at first about crossing the fields, and almost repented that I did not keep to the road ; now I shall regard my decision as exceedingly fortunate."

The girl made no answer, but walked quietly by his side. Presently her foot caught against a huge stone which stood in the path, and she stumbled.

"Pardon me," said Duncan, "but could I render a further service by offering my arm?"

"Thank you," said the girl, and she accepted his offer.

The young man realised a pleasant sensation as she placed her hand upon his arm. The night did not seem at all dreary now, nay, rather he was glad that the darkness made the girl dependent on him.

"You know the neighbourhood well?" she asked presently.

"Yes, I think so," said Duncan. "I have only just come to the district, but I have spent a good deal of time on these moors. They are very fine, and they help me to do my work."

"You are the minister of Tudor Chapel, I think you said?"

"Yes."

"Then can you work so far away from your church?"

"Yes; I work out my sermons on these moors. They inspire me to think, and—and somehow they make my world bigger, and life less sordid."

"But you cannot read on the moors?"

"I could when I first came, we had a fine September, you remember; but I do not care so much about reading for a month or two. I did nothing else for six years, and it is a relief to me now to rest my eyes."

"But you are fond of reading?"

"Oh, yes, naturally."

"Why naturally?"

"Oh, I suppose a minister is bound to be a bookish man. Besides, this is supposed to be a bookish age."

Duncan Rutland was not sure, but he had an idea that the girl who walked by his side was she for whom he had opened the lodge-gates at Neville Priory that morning. He had learnt, too, that she was called Alizon; this he fancied was her Christian name, for he knew that it was of Lancashire origin, and he had never heard of it as a surname.

"I suppose you are fond of reading, too," he said, in order to keep the conversation going. She had not told him who she was, and therefore he felt a difficulty in speaking freely.

"Yes, I suppose so; but you as a minister would doubtless regard my reading as light and frivolous," she said laughingly. "I suppose all your books are very serious?"

"Oh, no. I read anything, everything, from Descartes to Dumas, from Sir William Hamilton to Sir Walter Scott."

"Do you read Dumas in the original?"

"Yes."

The girl felt more at ease with him now. She had found a subject in which they were both interested.

"Do you read Dumas?" asked Duncan.

"Yes, no—that is, I did, until——"

She stopped suddenly, and did not finish the sentence.

Naturally Duncan did not press his question, but he could not help wondering at her words. "Of course, some do not like French novelists," he went on, trying to make matters easy for her, "and Dumas described phases of life alien to our English ideas. Still he was a great master of Romance. Indeed, for pure romantic writing, he was in some respects superior to our own Sir Walter. It goes without saying that you have read 'The Monastery' and 'The Abbot?'"

"No."

"No! I pity you, or rather, I envy you. I would give something not to have read either of them. Let me recommend you——"

"No, I shall not read them." She spoke rather curtly.

"No!" said the young man curiously.

"No. The truth is—of course it is of no interest to you; but I am a Catholic."

"Oh, I understand."

"You may have heard my name, at least, my mother's name, Lady Neville; I am Alizon Neville."

"Oh, certainly. How foolish I am not to have thought of it!"

The young man felt in a somewhat awkward position. He remembered that Lady Neville was the representative of Catholicism in the district, and that he had been spoken of as an enemy to the Catholic faith.

"I suppose," he continued, presently, "that we are at the opposite poles in thought."

"I suppose so," she replied somewhat curtly.

For a time there was an awkward silence. Her words had placed a barrier between them, and the young man did not know how to break it down.

"Yours is a splendid old house," he said presently. "I like old houses. In fact, I like old things generally. There is generally some mystery surrounding them, and romance."

"Yes, I like old things too," she replied, "even in the world of religion," she added somewhat awkwardly.

"So do I," said Duncan heartily. "I like old churches, and I like visiting old monasteries and convents."

He wanted to set her at her ease, and he had no desire, nay, he felt it would be unkind to discuss religious matters with her. She, however, was young and enthusiastic; moreover, she was excited. She was thankful for his company across this dreary part of the country on a dark night, but she could not help feeling somewhat strange at the thought of walking with a young man whom she regarded as an enemy to all she had been taught to hold most dear. Without weighing her words, therefore, she began to argue with him.

"If you believe in an ancient religion," she said, "is it not strange that you should be the minister of a modern sect?"

"You do not wish me to answer you, Miss Neville, do you?" he asked with a laugh.

"It might be interesting if you did," she replied.

"Well, then," said Duncan, "if I went to live in an old house, I should most likely have the place newly drained, I should lighten the dark rooms, I should remove all possibility of disease. It would be the same house, only purified."

"You mean by that, that you believe in an ancient religion, but that it is freed from——"

"Excuse me," interrupted Duncan, "but had we not

better change the subject? Believe me, I hold all religious convictions as sacred. If your religion meets your deepest needs——”

“It does,” she replied hastily.

“Then, let us say no more about it.”

“But you are an enemy to my faith. You have attacked it in your chapel. I heard you—that is, I have read—the—the papers. Father Sheen told me——” Again she stopped awkwardly, she had said more than she had intended.

“I have heard that Father Sheen is a very good man,” said Duncan, again trying to help her.

“He is, indeed; the best man I know. I wish you knew him; I wish he could speak to you about—the things you condemn.”

“It would give me great pleasure to meet Father Sheen,” replied Duncan.

“You know nothing about the Catholic Church, I expect?” she continued presently.

“No; that is, I know little of your ceremonials, and your services generally.”

“Then why do you condemn them?”

She felt she was scarcely polite in continuing to press this subject, but the circumstances of their meeting caused her to act with less than her ordinary caution. Besides, she felt that she must defend her faith in the presence of its enemy.

“I don’t think I ever have,” replied Duncan. “As far as I know, I have never mentioned the Roman Catholic Church since I came to Lynford. I have simply dealt with what seems to me important principles.”

“Yes, but they affect our faith.”

“I cannot help that, can I?”

“But do you not think you should know something of

the beliefs of our Church before saying that which condemns them?"

"I really don't wish to speak about this," said Duncan, "but I suppose I must defend myself. I confess that I am ignorant concerning many of your ceremonials, but I know something of your beliefs, and the history of your Church. It may seem like boasting to say so, but I have read scores of books on the growth of Romanism. Indeed, for six years Church History has been a favourite study of mine."

"But your histories have been written by Protestants, I suppose?"

"Oh, no. I have read both sides."

"You have read Catholic History by Catholic historians?"

"Oh, yes," and he named several authors.

"And yet you remain a Protestant?"

"It depends on the standpoint from which we look at things, doesn't it? Believe me, I have no wish to foist my beliefs on you."

"Oh, you could not."

"I daresay not; but look, yonder is Boggart's Clough."

"Yes; I shall be able to find my way easily from there."

"You will at least allow me to accompany you as far as your lodge gates, Miss Neville. I shall have to pass them myself, and it is rather dark, although the mist has lifted somewhat."

She thanked him coldly, and walked by his side silently.

"I suppose your house was built in the fifteenth century," he went on presently.

"Yes, at least the old part of it was."

"It has a history, I suppose. It was the scene of some stormy deeds at the time of Henry VIII."

"Yes, I suppose so, but what is that light?"

"I think it must be the light at your lodge gates."

"Yes, it is. I am very glad. It is kind of you to walk with me, Mr. Rutland."

"And kinder of you to allow me," replied Duncan. "I am afraid you regard me as an unpleasant companion."

"You must confess that you are an enemy to my faith," she said impulsively.

"None the less, I hope I am capable of being ordinarily courteous," replied Duncan pleasantly. "I claim the liberty of thinking for myself, but then—surely there's some disturbance yonder," he said abruptly. "There are several lights, and I think I see a carriage."

"I hope mother has not been anxious about me," said the girl.

"I sincerely trust not. Let us hasten on."

"What's the matter?" asked Duncan as he came up to the gates.

He heard a lady's voice, but she did not speak in answer to him.

"I know she went to Mrs. Crossland's. I am afraid she must have been lost in coming across the fields. I'll go by the road in the carriage, and you must take the lantern through the fields."

There was a hubbub of voices, and Duncan had to speak aloud in order to make himself heard.

"Is that Lady Neville?" he said hurriedly.

"Yes," replied that lady.

"May I ask if you are looking for your daughter?"

"Yes, I am quite anxious. Have you seen her?"

"I am here, mother," said Alizon.

A few seconds later the necessary explanations were given, and Alizon sat in the carriage beside her mother.

"I am sure I am exceedingly obliged to you," said Lady

Neville to Duncan graciously. "Will you not ride with us as far as the Priory? You will be nearly two miles nearer your home."

Duncan accepted the invitation, but little was said during the journey, and the young man was glad when he found himself alone again.

"At any rate," mused the young man, as he sat in his study chair that night, "I have been introduced to the principal Catholic family in the district."

The next morning, as he opened the *Lynford Observer*, he saw a prominent announcement to the effect that Father Sheen would give a series of Sunday Evening Lectures on the Catholic Religion, and would answer some of the allegations made against his Church.

"Whew!" exclaimed Duncan as he read. "I see an exciting time in the future."

For several Sunday nights the congregations at Tudor Chapel were much thinned, while the Catholic Church was crowded to excess. Duncan read the reports of Father Sheen's addresses with much interest, and noted the letters which challenged him to answer the statements which the priest had made.

Father Sheen's lectures concluded amidst a flourish of trumpets, while Duncan made no sign whatever. The truth was, he was loath to enter into a wordy battle. In some ways he longed for the fight. He noted the weak points in the priest's armour, and saw how easily his arguments might be answered, and yet some power held him back.

Presently the townspeople began to laugh freely, and some spoke to him rather jeeringly on the subject.

"We thought yo 'ad more grit in you, Mester," said an old weaver. "If Luther 'ad bin like yo, we'd 'ad Popery wi' us naa. I tell yo, yo're noan Lancashire."

"No, I'm not," said Duncan, "but what would you have me do?"

"Answer him from Tudor. Ef what you said t' first Sunday neet is true, then your duty is plain."

"Do you think it would help Christianity?"

"Yi, I do 'n' all. An' soa do most foak. Besides, it's a bit like a coward's trick, and we at Tudor are noan pleased at aar passon showin' th' white feather."

"I suppose not."

"Weel, what art a baan to do?"

"I don't know yet."

"Weel, it's time tha sud. Th' other passons are sayin' thet if yo' do'ant they will; but as yo' started th' job, yo' sud bear 't brunt. Hast a seen th' letter in Wednesday's *Observer*?"

"No, I've read none of them."

"Weel, a chap theer suggests thet yo' shud challenge Sheen to a public debate in th' Industrial Hall."

"I see. Good morning."

"Good morning," said the old weaver in a surly tone.

The young minister went into the public reading-room, and took up the *Lynford Observer*. He turned to the letter which the weaver had mentioned, and then pondered deeply for some minutes. He longed to prove to these Lancashire people that he was not a coward, longed to defend his beliefs, and yet he hesitated—he could not tell why.

He walked out of the town, and presently reached a footpath across some fields. His mind was very active, and before he realised what he was doing he had sketched a series of addresses which he felt would destroy the arguments of the priest.

"But I'll not give them," he said to himself, as he wan-

dered on. "I'll not give them ;" but he could not tell why he had come to this decision.

Presently he looked up and saw Alison Neville coming towards him. He had neither seen nor heard anything concerning her since the night he had accompanied her across the moors. He had often thought of her since then, and had wondered if they would ever meet again.

He went towards her with quickened step, and almost held out his hand. She, in her turn, nodded coldly, and passed on without a word.

He was disappointed, and yet he knew no reason why he should be. He had no right to expect, because he had rendered her a simple service, that she should treat him cordially in the future. Besides, she bore one of the oldest names in Lancashire ; she was a daughter of one of its most important houses ; it was natural, therefore, that she should treat him, the minister of Tudor Chapel, and an enemy to her faith, with coldness, if not disdain.

"I must get back to my work," he thought presently, and a little later sat before his desk. He took up his pen to write a sermon ; this, however, was the document which he produced :—

"To the Editor of the *Lynford Observer*.

"SIR,

"As I do not think it would best serve the interests of truth if I followed the example of Father Sheen, and gave a series of addresses in my church, especially as many Roman Catholics would not, or dare not, enter the building, I shall be happy to fall in with the suggestion made by 'Truth-lover' in Wednesday's issue of your paper. I therefore invite Father Sheen to a public debate of three nights' duration, to be held in the Industrial Hall, on any dates most suitable to him. I would suggest a committee

of twelve gentlemen, of which half shall be Protestant and half Roman Catholic (although the Roman Catholics do not number a tenth of the population) to arrange proceedings. I am perfectly willing, moreover, that Father Sheen shall select three such subjects as he regards to be essentially Roman Catholic, as the topics of debate, and thus we shall be able to publicly discuss, on neutral grounds, those great issues which cleave the Church in twain. I would, however, although I have never uttered one word against the Roman Church, *per se* (the correspondence in your paper, and Father Sheen's addresses having arisen out of broad general principles which I enunciated), suggest the following topics for Father Sheen's consideration.

"1. Was the Reformation, and the consequent growth of Protestantism, a Necessity?

"2. Is the doctrine of Papal Infallibility in accordance with the teaching of Scripture, History, or reason?

"3. Is private judgment in matters of religion right or wrong?

"Yours faithfully,

"DUNCAN RUTLAND."

On the following Saturday the editor printed Duncan's letter in large type, heading it with the words, "A Challenge to Father Sheen." A leading article was also given, supposed to be impartial, while many suggestions were offered. Before the day was over, the religious element in the town was in a state of great excitement.

"Ah," said the young Protestants to the Catholics, who had been calling Duncan a coward, "we shall see who's th' coward now;" while all sorts of surmises were offered as to the probable result of the letter which had been written.

And thus Duncan was led by forces of which he had

never dreamed, towards a path which changed the whole trend of his life.

"Father Sheen 'll noan tak thee up," said a man to him as he passed down the street that night.

"Yi, but he will," said another.

CHAPTER IV

HOW DUNCAN'S LETTER AFFECTED FATHER SHEEN

FATHER SHEEN sat in his study on the morning on which Duncan's letter appeared in the *Lynford Observer*. He had performed his offices in the Church, had afterwards eaten a good breakfast, and had now come into his study for a little quiet.

"I've had a busy time," thought the priest, "and now I'll have a rest. Those addresses cost me a world of anxiety and labour in spite of all the help I could get. But they are over now, and that young fellow has not shown fight. Well, I'm glad I gave them. I shouldn't be surprised if they result in converts."

He sat down before the fire, and saw a copy of the *Lynford Observer* lying on the table by his side. "More letters, I expect," he thought. "I must say I am surprised that young Rutland has never written a word. Well, all the greater victory for me. I shall now be regarded as a champion of our Cause."

A minute later he sat with his mouth open, and his eyes staring into vacancy. At first he could not believe what he read, but presently he saw that there could be no mistake about it.

"Bother it!" he cried at length. "I never imagined the fellow would do this. At the worst I thought he would

only answer me in his own chapel. But a public debate! a public debate!"

He perused Duncan's letter again very carefully.

"I therefore invite Father Sheen to a public debate of three nights' duration, to be held in the Industrial Hall, on any dates most suitable to him," he read aloud.

"I suppose I must accept," he said piteously, "although Heaven knows I am not prepared for such work. I wish I'd never meddled with the business. I shouldn't, either, but for Lady Neville and Alizon. Yes, it was Alizon who was always at me."

There could be no doubt about it, Father Sheen was much worried. He paced his room many times, constantly giving expression to savage ejaculations.

"I'm not the man for the work," he said; "I've done but very little reading on those lines for many years. I've forgotten my Greek, while even my Latin is rusty; as for Church history, I am all at sea. I'm an old man, too, while this young fellow is fresh from six years of training. I'll refuse; I'll say I haven't time; I'll refuse to discuss the doctrines of the Church with a heretic."

All this did not satisfy him, however, because he knew it would not satisfy the public. To say that Father Sheen had a bad half-hour after reading Duncan's letter, would be to describe his feelings very inadequately.

"It's all Lady Neville's fault; yes, and Alizon's," he said at length. "They got me into this scrape, and they ought to get me out of it. I'll go down to the Priory; that's it. I know her ladyship's at home. She will help me out of it."

This decision evidently gave Father Sheen considerable relief. There is always comfort in the thought of being able to shift our burdens to the shoulders of others, and a few minutes later as he made his way towards the Priory,

he felt quite jubilant at the thought that her ladyship would help him out of his dilemma.

"Well, Father Sheen," said her ladyship, "I am honoured this morning. It is not often you come before lunch, except on special occasions. I hope nothing's the matter."

"Plenty's the matter," said the priest. "I wish to speak to you on a very important subject this morning."

"Come into the library. There's a good fire, and no one is in the room but Alizon. You don't mind her being present, I suppose?"

"Oh no, oh no. It has to do with Alizon as much as with you."

"That's right," said her ladyship, leading the way, and wondering what caused the woebegone expression on the old man's face.

Alizon met Father Sheen with bright eyes as he entered, and bestowed on him a look of genuine affection.

"Father Sheen wants to see us both this morning, Alizon," said her ladyship pleasantly. "I hope you've not been a naughty girl," she added with a laugh.

"Oh, no, nothing of the sort," said the old priest hurriedly. "Have you read—that is—have you seen?—but I suppose you haven't?"

"Seen what?" asked her ladyship.

"This morning's *Lynford Observer*."

"No, I haven't."

"Then, here—read this, your ladyship," and he put the paper in her hands.

Lady Neville began to open the paper.

"Excuse me, let me find it for you," said the old priest hurriedly. "Ah, there it is—that letter, signed Duncan Rutland. It's an awful business, isn't it?"

Lady Neville read the letter, and then with a smile passed it on to Alizon.

"What shall I do?" asked Father Sheen.

"There's only one thing you can do."

"What?"

"Why, accept, of course."

"But I can't. I—I—that is, I'm very rusty on such questions."

"Then you must furbish your weapons. My library will be at your disposal. The letter is perfectly fair, perfectly courteous; you cannot refuse. You would be the laughing-stock of the town if you did."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure you would. You see, you gave those addresses."

"I did, I did," said the old man ruefully. "You persuaded me, you and Alizon, to give them. I wish I hadn't."

"Why, you told me they had been well received."

"Yes, they were, or they seemed so; but a public debate, your ladyship, a public debate!"

"Nothing could be better. You are, of course, sure of your arguments?"

"Perfectly, oh, perfectly." This he said in such a plaintive way that her ladyship could not help laughing aloud.

"Then what is there to fear? You are not a youth of twenty-six, you are an old man, and a skilled debater. All the arguments for our faith must be perfectly familiar to you."

"Your ladyship is very kind."

"Not at all. I am simply wanting to show that this is a most fortunate occurrence. You will be able to speak to a Protestant audience, you will be able to show them the truths of our faith, and make them realise how foolish they are to keep out of the Church. Why, you might begin a New Reformation movement in the town."

"Yes, yes," said Father Sheen tamely.

Lady Neville was partly in earnest, and partly joking in what she said. Belonging as she did to an old Catholic family which had suffered much for faith's sake, she was a good Catholic; she did not believe that any arguments which Rutland might adduce would do harm to her cause; at the same time she doubted the powers of Father Sheen. While believing in the sacredness of the priest's offices, she regarded many of the priests very lightly as men. In the past, many who had come to the Priory to say Mass, were not even invited to partake of food with the family, but had to be content with the company of the butler, or, at best, the housekeeper. Since those days custom had changed, and she now treated Father Sheen with respect, but she had no exaggerated notions of his powers as a debater and scholar. She was sincere in her belief that he would triumph in argument, but she could not help laughing at the thought of the old man appearing as an intellectual gladiator.

The gift of humour is very dangerous to a religion built on ceremonial. Lady Neville did not realise this at the time, nevertheless she felt a strong curiosity to know what Duncan Rutland would say.

"Of course, all the Catholics would have to be invited to come," sighed the priest.

"Of course."

"Don't you think it will be very dangerous? That young Rutland is a clever fellow."

"But you will be there to answer him. Think of the triumph of pulverising him!"

"Yes, yes, of course," said Father Sheen sadly. "Of course you will come and sit on the platform?"

"If you wish it."

"Oh, I do, I do! But—but don't you think it would

be better if I got one of our recognised speakers to accept his challenge?"

"No, certainly not."

"Why?"

"Because the people would assume that you are afraid, and because the words of a stranger could not have the same weight as yours."

"You think not?"

"I am sure of it. If you invited one of the recognised debaters, Rutland would be justified in doing the same thing. No, no, you are the man. Besides, when you have beaten him, I see promotion for you as a consequence.

Poor Father Sheen, he would gladly have given up the chance even of a Bishopric if he could have been spared the awful ordeal that faced him.

Alizon had listened eagerly to all that had been said, and if the truth must be told she was delighted at the course events were taking. Unlike her mother, she regarded Father Sheen as a formidable antagonist, and she longed for the fray to begin. She could not help feeling, after Duncan had accompanied her across the moors, that he had refused to argue with her, because he regarded her as unworthy of the trouble. There had been a patronising tone in his remarks which she resented, and as she listened to the conversation, she pictured the enthusiasm of the Catholic portion of the audience, and the consternation of the Protestants, as the old priest showed the glory of the Church, and the fallacies of the Reformed faith. Nourished as she had been on Catholic tradition, and ignorant of the true issues of the Reformation, she believed that selfishness, greed, and lust had caused the cleavage of the Church, and if Protestants would only open their ears to the truth, the Church of her fathers would be flooded with converts.

"Oh, I am delighted!" she said; "it is glorious, Father Sheen."

"Of course, of course," said the old man gloomily.

"When will you begin?" she asked. "I am afraid it will be impossible before Christmas."

"Yes, yes," said the old man eagerly, "it will be impossible before Christmas. It must take considerable time. I shall have to spend much time in reading."

"In reading! Why?"

"I must prepare myself."

"But you have been a priest for forty years. Are you not always prepared?"

"Yes, yes, of course," replied the old man gloomily.

"Besides, the longer you delay the matter, the longer time this Mr. Rutland will have to prepare. I do long for you to give him a good thrashing. He is a conceited fellow."

"Is he? How do you know?"

"Oh, I met him once," and Alizon described her journey with him across the moors.

"And what did you think of him, Lady Neville?" asked the old man eagerly.

"Oh, he seems a smart fellow. He looks and speaks more like a lawyer than a dissenting minister. He is the very opposite of the approved type. But for the fact that he is clean-shaven, he has a certain military air. He is young, gentlemanly, and I should say decidedly good-looking. But such fellows are seldom strong as debaters."

Father Sheen shook his head gloomily.

"Well, what would you advise me to do?" he asked.

"Oh, I should write to the paper saying that you accept Mr. Rutland's invitation."

"Yes, what then?" he asked plaintively. "Really, Lady Neville, I am not the man for this work."

"I should fix, say the 10th, 17th, and 24th of January

for the debate. Those are early-closing nights, and the people will be able to come in crowds."

"Of course, of course," said the old man, but in his heart of hearts he prayed that the hall might be empty.

"Then I should name six of our most respected Catholics to act as a part of the Committee, and leave them to arrange details."

"Yes."

"That is all, I think."

"All except the subjects."

"Oh, yes, the subjects. Well, do you accept those which he has suggested? They strike me as important. If you prove your case on the lines he marks out, Protestantism crumbles to the ground."

"Oh, quite. Crumbles to the ground;" and the old man repeated the words in a lugubrious tone of voice.

"Oh, it is fine!" cried Alizon. "Let us write the letter now, Father Sheen; I do long to see it before it appears in print!"

Half an hour later the letter was written and approved of. Alizon was jubilant, Lady Neville confident, Father Sheen in despair.

"You will stay to lunch?" asked her ladyship.

"No, thank you, I must get back. January the 10th—the 10th. No, I must get back."

"You will select your books now," said Lady Neville, looking around the well-filled shelves.

"Thank you, thank you. Do—do you think it would be well for me to call on Mr. Rutland?" he asked timorously.

"Why?"

"Well, it might be courteous, you know. He is a stranger, and we might—well——"

"What?"

"Arrange some sort of compromise."

"Compromise with an avowed heretic?" cried Alizon.

"Of course, of course I did not mean that," said the timorous old man hurriedly, "I did not mean that. I only thought we might place the matter on a friendly footing."

"I think such an action would be wrongly construed," said her ladyship.

"Doubtless you are right; doubtless you are right. Of course any compromise is impossible. We must give no quarter, we must be bold for the truth," but the old man's eyes were humid, and his lips tremulous as he spoke.

A little later Father Sheen left the Priory in a carriage. Around him was piled a large number of books, while in his pocket was a letter, which he dropped in a post-box on his way back, and in which he accepted Duncan Rutland's challenge.

"Oh, I wish I could get out of this," he said, as he threw himself in his study chair. "It is all Alizon's fault. She went to hear the fellow, and afterwards gave me no rest until I had given those addresses. What he said was quite true; he did not openly attack us."

Father Sheen did not doubt the foundation on which his faith rested; he only doubted himself. He felt sure he was not fit for the duty which faced him. He was getting old, he was timorous, and he was neither a thinker nor a student. He knew men who would have rejoiced in this fray; young, eager men, who had all the arguments at their finger-tips. Oh, if it were possible for one of them to take his place!

The following Wednesday Father Sheen's letter appeared, and a few days later arrangements for the debate were made. All the town was in a ferment, and on the night of January 10th the doors of the Industrial Hall were literally besieged more than an hour before the time announced for the debate to begin.

CHAPTER V

A TOURNAMENT OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

WHEN Lady Neville and Alizon took their places on the platform the Industrial Hall was packed from floor to ceiling. A charge had been made for admission, the arrangement being that all money should be given to local charities, but this had evidently made no difference to the attendance. No less than two thousand people were within the building, all eager, excited. The mental and moral atmosphere of the place was electric. All were wondering as to the results of a debate unprecedented in the history of Lynford. Like most Lancashire towns, a great deal of religious sentiment was manifest. With the exception of perhaps Yorkshire and Cornwall, Lancashire has more religious sentiment than any county in England. There is, moreover, no county where the people will give so liberally to religious objects as in Lancashire. Thousands of people who seldom attend a place of worship, regard themselves as being identified with some Church, either Conformist or Nonconformist. They pay for a pew, and may be generally depended upon at School Sermons, or, as they are often called, "Charity Sermons." The religious bodies may be roughly described in their own terms: Chapel, Church, Catholics. First in strength

and number come the Nonconformist bodies. They form the great bulk of religious people; then comes the Established Church, and afterwards the Catholics, most of whom are importations from Ireland and elsewhere. Each and all love their churches with great fervour, and many would sacrifice a great deal rather than their own particular spiritual home should suffer.

The great audience gathered at the Industrial Hall was mostly composed of Nonconformists and Catholics. A good sprinkling of Churchmen were present, but as their position was largely that of a compromise between the Church of ancient ceremonial on the one hand, and the unflinching Protestantism of the other, they did not feel inclined to take any prominent part. Besides, some of them naturally felt slightly annoyed that a young Free Churchman should monopolise so much of the attention of the people.

When Father Sheen entered there was a great buzz of excitement. His supporters shouted vociferously, and gave him every encouragement in their power. The old man looked pale and haggard, but resolute. Now that the fight had practically commenced, he felt far less fear than when through the past few weeks he had been preparing to meet his opponent. There could be no doubt that he was very anxious; but deadly in earnest. He felt himself to be a champion of the truth, and was bold accordingly. Moreover, the books he had been reading sustained his courage. He felt sure he had a strong case, and that however clever Duncan might be, his facts could not be shaken. He nodded to Lady Neville and Alizon, and smiled sadly but confidently when the young girl looked affectionately towards him.

On the platform were two tables, on each of which was a large pile of books.

"There's a rare lot of dry stuff in yon," said one man to another, who sat close to the platform.

"Yi, us 'eads 'll be jammed full o' learnin' afore they've done to-neet. What time is 't?"

"It wants baat three minutes the aaf aar."

"Well, th' 'oud un's 'ere 't ony rooad."

"Yi," said an enthusiastic Catholic, who sat close by, "oo's noan afeard. It 'll be young 'un as 'll back aat if ony body does."

"Ay, but ther'll be no backing aat to-neet."

As if in confirmation of his words, several more people took their place on the platform, followed by Duncan. There was a great shout when he came, and a good deal of hissing.

"Ther' shell be fecar play 't ony rooad," said men to each other all over the hall as they heard the hissing.

Duncan was pale to the lips as he took his seat. He was a young man, and this was his first great public ordeal. He had enjoyed the debates at College, but on those occasions there was not an excited throng listening to him, nor reporters present to take down every word he said. He looked over the audience and saw hundreds of kindly faces, and some scowling ones. But he was not afraid. Every nerve was strung to full tension, and his heart beat more quickly than was its wont; the young man had no idea of fear, however. His brain was clear, and every sense was alert.

While the hubbub subsided, he looked around the platform and noted the face of Father Sheen. He recognised Lady Neville too, but that lady took no notice of him. When his eyes rested on Alizon, however, she was looking towards him. The moment their eyes met, she turned away from him with a smile that was almost con-

temptuous. Evidently she felt very bitterly towards the man who would attack her faith.

At length the chairman arose, and in a few words stated the conditions of the debate. He had them written down in order to prevent mistakes. Each speaker was to be allowed half an hour, and the meeting was to last three hours. Thus each man would make three speeches. Having made this plain, the chairman said he had only a word more to say before calling on Father Sheen, who was to speak first. It was simply that he expected fair play on the part of the audience. No speaker should be interrupted by his hearers, and the arrangements of the meeting must be carried out decently and in order.

"We are met i' Lancashire," said the chairman, "where men like to spaik their mind. On the one hand is a man who has been in the taan for mony a year ; I'm sure you'll give him a fair hearing."

At this there was general applause.

"On the other hand, is a young man, a stranger to us, many on us know next to nowt abaat him ; but he's the minister of Tudor Chapel, and because we believe in fair play, we'll give him a fair hearing too."

Again the applause seemed general.

"That's all," said the chairman. "I now call upon Father Sheen to open the question as to 'Whether the Reformation and the Consequent Growth of Protestantism was a necessity?'"

There was a great shout as Father Sheen rose to speak, while Duncan noticed that Alizon Neville clapped her hands most enthusiastically. There was a look of eager confidence in her eyes.

Father Sheen was an Irishman. He had lived long enough away from his native country to lose some of the brogue for which Ireland is famous, but he had not lost

the homely eloquence so common to the Celt. Moreover, after he had uttered a few words, and heard the wild cheering of his supporters, his fear forsook him.

He had no notes, and he spoke with perfect ease and fluency. After awhile, too, he allowed the Irish gift of humour to manifest itself, while occasionally he spoke with fervour and passion. He spoke of what the Church had done; what it was to the people. He described it as a refuge for the weary, a home for the homeless, and "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." He told the audience of its ideals, of its outlook, its unity. Then he described the Reformation, and spoke of the disunion, the enmity, the hatred, the wars that followed; how families were disunited, how faith was wrecked, and how nations were led to engage in ghastly and bloody wars.

"This," he cried, as he saw the hand of the clock pointing to the minute when he was supposed to stop, "this is what the Reformation has meant to Christendom; and I ask you, not as Catholics, or Protestants, not even as English people, but as men and women who love righteousness, truth, and purity, was that so-called Reformation a necessity?"

A great shout rose from the Catholic portion of the audience, a shout of triumph. Even his supporters did not believe that Father Sheen could have spoken so powerfully, so well, while a look almost of doubt rested on the faces of the Protestants. They had never heard the Reformation stated in this light before, and they feared for Duncan's power to answer the old Irishman. The great mass of them knew nothing of history; they were Protestants because they had been trained to believe in its doctrines, and, also, because the sturdy independence of their natures discarded the idea of priestcraft. Thus, in the excitement of the hour, the Church of Rome appeared

as the very haven of God, while Protestants were represented as enemies to those tired souls who longed to enter there for rest and peace.

Alizon Neville's eyes were full of joyful tears as her old Father Confessor sat down. To her he seemed like one of the old saints who were heroes for the truth. To her his arguments seemed unanswerable, and she rejoiced with great joy as, in the eye of faith and imagination, she saw thousands in this Puritan town coming back to the Church under whose wings she had been sheltered.

Duncan had been jotting down a few notes while the priest was speaking, he had also opened many of the books before him, and marked certain passages.

"Old Sheen hev given 'im a fair 'ard nut to crack," said some of the audience.

"Ay, and e'll noan crack it," replied others.

"Yi, but he will," said old Matthy Bray, "yo'll see. Let 'im geet on his feet and he'll mak' mincemait on 'im."

When Duncan rose there was a dead silence. The excitement was too great for cheering. Even his most earnest admirers feared for him. Their confidence, however, was somewhat assured when they saw how perfectly composed he was.

He had intended, he said, to have given an address which he had prepared, but he should, perhaps, best serve the interests of truth, by traversing the statements of Father Sheen, whose speech resolved itself into three parts. First, there was his picture of the Church before the Reformation. Then there was the fact of the Reformation, and afterwards, the result of that movement.

Dealing with the first point he asked whether the picture of the Church drawn by Father Sheen was a true picture. If it were, then the Reformers were enemies of the truth, and of God. But was it? He then sketched the true

state of the Church. He showed how it had been stripped of faith, of purity, of common decency. He proved from the writings of even Catholic historians that the priests mumbled articles in which they did not believe, that they went from vile debauchery to the churches to say Masses. That from the popes downward, the clergy were pagan and impure. That the pardon of sins had been degraded into a trade; that a tariff for the forgiveness of sin was fixed—so much for murder, so much for lying, so much for stealing, so much for adultery. Money could buy almost anything. He showed how the people were at the mercy of the priests; how they governed almost every office. He read extracts from historians showing that if men dared to oppose the priests they were excommunicated, and when that was done, it was a sin to give them shelter, a sin to give them food, or help in any way, and that if any one showed kindness to an excommunicated person, he or she was liable to the same penalty.

It was a terrible picture which he drew, and all the more terrible because every statement was substantiated by a recognised historian. Before he had finished it, a look of revengeful hatred settled on the faces of one part of the audience, while on the faces of the other part, a look of wonderment was expressed. They had no idea of what had existed at the end of the fifteenth century.

“So much for the pretty fairy tales, the pathetic picture Father Sheen has drawn of the Church prior to the Reformation,” said Duncan, as he finished this part of his address.

The remark relieved the intense excitement to which the audience had been worked up, and a great laugh rose from the audience. This moment's interval allowed Duncan time to turn round and open one or two other books. In doing so he saw Alizon Neville. All the joyous triumph had gone from her eyes, her face was pale to the lips, her

hands were clenched nervously. He saw, too, that Father Sheen's cheeks were flabby, and that he was sorely uncomfortable.

He then sketched the immediate cause of Luther's actions. He described Tetzel's visit to the quiet German town, gave quotations from his sermons, quotations which promised that for a sum of money he would forgive not only the sins they had committed, but those which they intended to commit. He read the blasphemous words of Tetzel, where he said that God no longer reigned, but that all power was given to the Pope.

At this juncture the chairman rang the bell. This indicated that he had only three minutes more.

"Very well," said Duncan, "I have not, at present, time to deal with the supposed evil results of the Reformation, but I shall have an opportunity presently. Up to the present I have shown you the value of Father Sheen's arguments. Arguments?" he repeated with a smile, "arguments—why a boy of seven could play at ninepins with them."

The homely figure appealed to the humour of the audience, and the place echoed with laughter, and before it subsided it was time for Father Sheen to commence his second address.

The old man did his best. He reiterated what he had before said; but he had lost his power over the audience. It is true the Catholic portion of the audience still cheered him, but there was no hope, no confidence in the cheer. He tried to traverse the young man's statements, but even his own friends saw that he failed. The old priest felt it too, and he began to be confused. He saw the good-humoured ridicule which was expressed on the people's faces, and then he did what a true debater would never have done, he descended to invective. When his half-hour was up he had not helped his cause; thus it was that when

Duncan rose the second time, he was met with tumultuous cheering.

He could not help being elated, it was not in human nature to feel otherwise. He looked again at Alizon Neville's face, and saw chagrin, discomfiture, anger. Lady Neville looked at him superciliously, scornfully, while a low growl of anger was heard in the hall. All this aroused his defiance, and caused him to speak more strongly than he had intended.

First of all he took the statements contained in Father Sheen's second address, and held them up to ridicule; then he dealt with the indictment which the priest had hurled at Protestantism. "Look at it," the old priest had said, "look at Protestantism. Think of what it has done. It has torn the Church in pieces, it has wrecked the faith of millions, it has sent untold multitudes to eternal perdition. Look at your Protestant countries. Where is your unity? It does not exist. You are a rope of sand; you are torn to pieces by petty conflicting sects. Protestantism is doomed because it rests on a false foundation."

This gave Duncan the chance he had hoped for, and he used the chance to great advantage. He showed how while Protestant countries had prospered, had become strong and mighty, Catholic countries had become weaker and weaker. He described the relative positions of Germany and Spain, and showed that while the Pope had cursed the former and blessed the latter, the former had prospered, while the latter was crumbling into decay, and was day by day becoming more impotent. He showed that Austria and Portugal could not be said to belong to the advancing countries of the world, but were gradually becoming mere names on a map. He portrayed the condition of France, largely a nation of atheists, and often governed by the passions of the mob. He pointed out

that Italy, the home of the Vatican, had only become great by throwing off allegiance to the Pope, and that ever since, the Papacy had sulked because of the position of the Italian Government. Then he traced the history of England from the time of the Spanish Armada. He described how the Pope had blessed this movement of Spain, and cursed the heresy which had robbed him of England, and how England had, through her independence of, and freedom from priestly tyranny, marched on to greatness. He showed how the one spot in the United Kingdom where abject poverty and ignorance reigned was in Catholic Ireland, while Protestant Ireland was prosperous and contented.

"Now," he said in conclusion, "have I proved my case? Was the Reformation a necessity? And have the results of the Reformation justified the action of those who freed us from Papal chains?"

When Father Sheen rose for the third time the debate was as good as closed. Even Alizon Neville and her mother saw that it was an unequal contest. They saw that much more could be said on their side than it had come to Father Sheen's mind to say. Even the most intelligent Protestants saw that the Catholic arguments had not been ably set forth. Whatever might be the merits of the case itself, the old priest was no match for the eager young debater fresh from his studies. It was like an old worn-out soldier, who had never been at his best a good fencer, doing battle with an antiquated, rusty sword, against a skilled fencer, who was young, strong, and active, and whose blade was new and bright and keen.

Had one of the skilled Jesuit debaters taken the place of Father Sheen, Duncan's work would have been far more difficult, as it was he was victorious all along the line. He had estimated the Lancashire character, had appealed to

their sturdy independence, and given the bare strong facts which they so much love. When, therefore, he rose for his last address, he had little to answer. And for half an hour, moved to intense passion by the enthusiasm of the crowd, he poured forth a glowing tribute to the men who, he said, had made us, as a nation, strong and great and free. With anecdote, pathos, passion, humour, he carried the audience with him, until, as he sat down, the great mass of men and women rose to their feet and gave him an ovation.

"By Jove," said a young lawyer who had come to the hall, not because he had any great interest in the subject, but because he loved a battle of brains, "Rutland has used poor old Sheen as a brush with which he has swept the floor. The fellow ought to have been a barrister."

Duncan watched while Lady Neville and Alizon left the platform, followed by the old priest. Neither of them spoke to him, but when they reached the door Alizon gave him a look which he never forgot.

Old Matthy Bray climbed on the platform and shook hands with the young minister.

"I know'd thou wert middlin' well off for brains, mester," he said, "but aw did'n think tha 'ed so mich grit in thee."

A number of people who had gathered around laughed at the old weaver's words.

"And naa tak a bit of advice," continued the old man. "Thee slip aat at th' side dooar, and go whoam in a cab."

"I'll take that advice," said Duncan.

"Ay, an' a few on us will go wi' 'im," said another, "for ther's a lot ov Irish aatside."

"Yi, and tak care o' thysen till this debate is ovver," continued Matthy.

Duncan Rutland realised the wisdom of this advice before a week had passed away.

CHAPTER VI

ALIZON NEVILLE'S DILEMMA

DURING the next few days the chief topic of conversation was the debate between Father Sheen and Duncan Rutland. Never before had the town been so much moved. General election speeches seemed tame compared with addresses on Church history. At the mills, where hundreds of men and women gathered together, Father Sheen's failure was discussed and laughed at. The Catholics longed to invite one of their acknowledged propagandists to meet Duncan, but they dared not do so. For, first of all, the debate was announced to be between Father Sheen and the young minister ; and second, it would seem a slight on the old man to suggest it to him. The daily conversation, however, fanned the excitement into a greater flame, and hundreds secretly resolved to be at the Industrial Hall on the following week hours before the time announced for the commencement of the discussion.

"Ther'll be nowt left ov owd Sheen but his gaan by th' end o' th' next fight," said one sturdy Puritan to a devoted Catholic, "th' owd man sud a know'd better nor tackle a lad like Rutland."

"Wait a bit," replied the Catholic, "the gaame's noan played aat yet. Thou't see that Rutland is nobbut a gassy coward."

The listeners laughed, but some did not like the tone in which the man spoke.

As for Father Sheen he was never seen in the town. What he did no one knew, except that he locked himself in his study, and that no one was allowed to interrupt him.

The speeches were reported verbatim in the *Lynford Observer*, and Alizon Neville read them through carefully.

"I hate him, mother," she said, when she had finished.

"It's very unfortunate," replied Lady Neville. "I ought to have known better. It is all my fault, I am afraid."

"Why?" asked Alizon.

"Well, it was I, or rather it was you, who persuaded Father Sheen to give those addresses. Had they not been given this discussion would not have taken place.

"Yes, yes, I know; but I thought that——"

"Yes, I know, Alizon; but Father Sheen is neither a scholar nor a debater. I ought to have realised that at the time. It is true his first speech was good, but I did not imagine that the young minister was so clever."

"Clever! Do you think him clever?"

"I'm afraid we can't help thinking so, darling. No one could fail to see that Father Sheen fared badly."

"I don't think him clever a bit," said Alizon passionately.

"He is just a vulgar, conceited——" she hesitated for a word—"coxcomb," she added presently.

"He may be all that," replied Lady Neville, "but he is none the less clever. I cannot help dreading the next meeting. I hear that many Catholics have been sorely unsettled by what was said by Mr. Duncan. No doubt he could be easily answered, and had Father Sheen been a scholar and a thinker he would be answered; but unfortunately he is not."

Alizon was silent. Up to the time when Father Sheen had met Duncan she would have contested her mother's

closing statement. To her the old man had always given evidence of wide reading and sound thinking; since then, however, she had seen her mistake.

"I suppose the debate must take its course?" she said presently.

"It cannot be helped. It has been publicly announced. The hall has been engaged and the people will be there. Many Catholics will be there too, and the next subject is more dangerous than the last."

"The Infallibility of the Pope, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"There is no doubt about it, mother, is there?" asked Alizon anxiously.

"Of course not, since the Church has decreed that it shall be an article of faith. As you know, Cardinal Newman opposed the Vatican decrees as long as he could, but when it was once decided he, naturally, accepted."

"Yes," replied Alizon dubiously. Even to her it seemed strange that any body of men could decide as to whether a doctrine should be accepted by the whole Catholic world, but no doubt it was right.

"And if that young man succeeds next Tuesday, as he did last Tuesday, it will be a still more dangerous blow for the Church?"

Lady Neville nodded.

"Oh," cried the girl eagerly, "I wish something would happen to prevent him from being there. Why does not God interfere?"

"Perhaps He will, my darling."

Alizon went much among the poor Catholics of the town, and was much beloved by them. During her visits the chief topic was still the debate. Many uncomplimentary remarks were passed about Duncan, and many threats of vengeance uttered. The ignorant and unreasoning part of

the people felt that they would be doing God service by preventing the next meeting.

"Tell tha what, Miss Alizon," said one brawny man of Irish origin, but who had been brought up in the town, "yon chap is nobbut the tool of the devil."

"I am afraid he is," was Alizon's unguarded reply.

"And aw believe it would be pleasin' the blessed Virgin if he wur traited as th' tool o' th' devil."

The young girl's eyes flashed. She was terribly angry with Rutland, and she was afraid lest her old Father Confessor should again fare badly at his hands. Moreover, her Church seemed to be in danger. In the past the Popes had passed edicts to destroy those who were enemies to the fold. She had been sometimes ashamed to confess this, but now she saw reason for it.

"Father Sheen's noan a match for yon chap," went on the man, "and there's allus a sight o' waik-kneed chaps as can't stand agin a felly wot's got th' gift o' th' gab like yon. I've 'eerd a' several as 'ave said they're noan goin' to Confession agean."

"It's terrible," said Alizon; "oh, I do wish that he might be away somewhere next Tuesday, and miss his train or something of that sort."

The collier's eyes lit up with an angry light.

"Maybe summatt 'll 'appen, Miss Alizon," he said; "let's 'oap so."

"Yes, let's hope so," replied the girl. She did not realise what she was saying, and had no idea of the effect of her words on the passionate, unthinking man.

The days passed away, and nothing of importance happened. The weather was drear and wet and cold. The streets were covered with black, slimy mud, the sky was laden with grime and soot, the hundreds of chimneys belched out clouds of black smoke. The weavers, however,



“ ‘ Maybe summatt ‘ll ‘appen, Miss Alizon.’ ”

did not mind. To a stranger, Lynford was the dreariest town imaginable, but to the natives it was the best place on earth. Whenever a visitor from a distant part of the country mentioned the drear ugliness of the town, he was met with the invariable reply—

“Yi, but thou’rt noan used to it.”

Still, in spite of the surroundings, thousands of brave, honest people lived there, and although many were rough and seemingly coarse, they possessed kind, loyal hearts, and would stand by a friend at all costs.

Since Duncan had invited Father Sheen to a public discussion he had risen wonderfully in the estimation of the crowd. They began to look upon him as a Lynford man, and often as he passed down the streets, the weavers would offer kindly remarks about him, of which the following is an example.

“Ay, but yon’s a gradely lad!”

“Yi, and oo’s got brains ’n all; an’ the gift o’ th’ gab above the middlin’. Art a baan next Tuesday neet?”

“Ay, I am, I sudden like to miss it. I hear as aa Lady Neville is fair cut up.”

“Yi, oo will be. Sheen ’ll ’ave to git up middlin’ early if oo’s to do owt wi’ Rutland.”

All this was sorely trying to those who held to the old Catholic faith, and many there were who shouted after Duncan as he passed along the streets, and uttered imprecations not at all pleasant.

On the afternoon of the day when the second debate was to take place, Duncan was passing down the main street, when old Matthy Bray met him.

“Weel, and aa are ye likin’ Lynford?” asked the old man.

“I like the people very much.”

"Aw thowt ye would. We got thee a rare congregation at Tudor on Sunday neet!"

"Yes, it was very large."

"An' yo' praiched a rare sermon 'n all."

"Thank you."

"Oa you deserve a word o' praise naa and then. "Appen yo' think yo've 'ad a fair lot o' th' tother sooart."

"Yes, I've been abused a bit."

"Weel, words do'ant 'urt much, but be careful, mester. I've warned ye more nor once. Do'ant go aat of a neet ovver mich, and 'ave comp'ny wi' ye. Aw spoase yo're ready for to-neet?"

"I think so."

"That's reight. Ther'll be a rare lot o' fowk."

"I expect so."

"Yi, theer will. Cathlicks would give summatt if tha sudden turn up."

"You think so?"

"Aw'm sure on 't. Thee be careful not to go aat to-neet till jist afore the meetin'. Some on us are goin' up to coom daan with thee."

"Thank you ; but surely there's no need?"

"Mebbe, but ther's lots o' fellys who wen they're short o' brains mak' it up i' ugliness."

"Have you any grounds for saying this?"

"Noa, noan wot ye might call wuth owt. But aw've 'eard some fellys callin' thee moas things but a gentleman and aw've seen black looks when thou'st gone by. I'm tellin' thee naa."

When Duncan got back to his lodgings it was past five o'clock. He sat down to the tea which his landlady had prepared, and was about to look over his notes before going to the Industrial Hall, when Mrs. Nutter entered and said a lad wanted to see him.

"Who is he?" asked Duncan.

"Oo ses oo goas to Tudor School," replied Mrs. Nutter.

Duncan went to the door and saw a lad about fifteen years of age.

"Fayther's deein', an' oo wants to sitha," said the lad.

"Who is your father?" asked Duncan, "and who are you?"

"Aw'm Bob o' th' Croft Farm's lad. They ca' me Billy Scott. Aw goa to Tudor Sunday Schoo'."

"What's the matter with your father?"

"Tha doctor's geein' 'im up. Aw knaw nowt no more. Oo wants to see tha reight bad. Oo's bin a bad 'un, too."

"Won't to-morrow morning do?"

"Noa. Doctor ses oo'll dee to-neet."

"Where is Croft Farm?"

"Just aboon Boggart's Clough."

Duncan looked at his watch. There was just time for him to visit the man before the debate. After all the walk might do him good; besides, he could not think of neglecting a dying man.

He told his landlady where he was going, and putting his notes in his pocket, started for Croft Farm.

"Some men will call here just after seven, Mrs. Nutter," he said. "Will you give them these books, and tell them where I've gone."

"Yi," said the woman laconically.

That same afternoon Alizon Neville was visiting among the poor Catholics of the town. It was rather depressing to her that so many of her fellow-religionists were so poor and thriftless. She could not help seeing the difference between them and the respectable working class audience she had seen on the only occasion on which she had entered a Protestant Church. As on the previous occasion the chief subject of conversation was about the debate,

"'Appen yo'll be there ageean, Miss Alizon," said one.

"Oh, yes, I shall be there."

"Ther'll be some rare fun to-neet," said the woman mysteriously.

"Fun?" queried Alizon. "To me it is not a matter for fun."

"But yo' know?"

"Know what?"

"Yo' know as aa Rutland 'll neer turn up."

"Not be there. Why?"

"You've 'eerd?"

"No, I've heard nothing;" all the same her heart beat high with hope. Would her prayers be answered after all?

"Yi, but it wur yo'as started it!"

"I! What do you mean, Mrs. Pickup?"

"Bridget Kelly told me all abaat it," said the woman confidentially.

"All about what?"

"What yo'said to her Shan."

"I said nothing particular to Shan Kelly."

"But yo' did, Miss Alizon," said the woman; "think agean."

"I said nothing, except that it would be a blessing if something prevented Mr. Rutland from attending the meeting to-night."

"Yi, that's it. Weel, Shan took the hint."

"What do you mean?"

"He tell'd thee, didn't 'a?"

"No, nothing."

"Well," said the woman, "Rutland 'll noan be theer. Oo'll be sent for to see a man wot's deein' at Croft Farm aboon Boggart's Clough."

"And is there a man dying there?"

"Not as I know on," and the woman laughed. "Oo'll be on his way there by naa."

"And what then?"

"When oo geets to Boggart's Clough, oo'll geet no further to-neet."

"But why?" asked Alizon excitedly,

"Cause Shan Kelly, and aar Ned, and Billy Suttle, wot works at Sutcliffe Mill, and some moor, 'll noan let him."

The plot was plain, even to Alizon's bewildered mind. She realised the effects of her words, she saw to what lengths her foolish statement might lead.

"But they'll not hurt him?" she gasped.

"Noan ovver mich. Oo'll seem to 'ave been suppin' more nor's gooid for him, that's all," and the woman laughed.

"This is terrible, terrible, Mrs. Pickup," she cried. "It is base, it is cowardly."

"Nay, nay," said the woman, with a touch of anger in her voice, "why, it wur yo' as set Shan Kelly on."

Alizon left the cottage with her head in a whirl. She saw herself a party to a brutal plot, and she walked along the gloomy street like one demented.

At first a feeling of joy possessed her. Duncan Rutland would not be at the Industrial Hall that night. This would mean a great triumph for Father Sheen and his party. Father Sheen would be there, but no opponent to meet him. Consequently the Catholic faith would triumph. But this was only for a moment. She felt ashamed that any unthinking words of hers should lead to such base actions. Moreover, the truth might presently come out, and then, guiltless as she was, she would become by-word for every Protestant in the town. But this was not all, nor the worst. The cowardliness of the act haunted her.

What could she do?

Nothing. Things must take their course. Probably the plot would fail. Rutland was a clever man, and he would discover the meaning of it. It would be best, therefore, that she should do nothing.

She heard the clocks of the town chiming the half-hour. She looked at her watch; it was half-past five. A few seconds later there was a great rattle of clogs on the stony pavements, and the streets were filled with men wearing greasy canvas clothes, and women with their heads covered with shawls.

"We mun mak' 'aaste," she heard them saying. "It's but little tay aw'll sup to-neet. Aw meean to 'ave a front seat."

They were speaking about the meeting at the Industrial Hall.

"What shall I do?" she asked herself.

CHAPTER VII

THE SCENE AT BOGGART'S CLOUGH

PRESENTLY Alizon Neville made up her mind. Catholic or no Catholic, it was her duty to warn Duncan Rutland. But how? She could not tell any one to do it, for by so doing she would reveal the plot of her co-religionists. Much as she hated the action, she did not wish the poor fellows to be punished. They thought they were doing what would be both pleasing to her and to Father Sheen. Besides, she shrunk from letting any one know that she had any knowledge of the matter. What then could she do?

She remembered Mrs. Pickup's words, "Oo'll be on his way theer by naa." But perhaps he might not be. She knew where Duncan lodged. She would go and warn him. It was a hard thing to do, but it was her duty, nevertheless. If he had left the house she must follow him to Boggart's Clough. He had accompanied her there once, now she would repay his services tenfold. But she hoped, profoundly hoped, that he would not have left his lodgings. Dinner was to be early at the Priory that night, so that she might accompany her mother to the debate; she knew, too, that she ought to go home at once; but instead, she made straight for the road in which Duncan lodged.

It was quite dark, but she recognised the house. It had been pointed out to her on one occasion. When she knocked at the door Mrs. Nutter appeared.

"Is Mr. Rutland in?"

"Noa," said the woman, peering at her curiously.

"Can you tell me where he is?" she asked with a heavy heart. She dreaded the journey to Boggart's Clough.

"Oo's gone to Croft Farm to pray wi' a deein' man," said Mrs. Nutter.

"How long has he been gone?"

"'Appen ten minutes."

"Thank you!" and she turned away.

"'Appen yo'll tell me what they call yo'," said Mrs. Nutter, "I can tell Mr. Rutland then."

But Alizon did not reply. She hurried away in the hope that she had not been recognised.

"If yon's not Lady Neville's lass, put me daan for a natcheral," said Mrs. Nutter. "What can she be wantin' wi' Rutland? Oo's noan her soart."

Meanwhile Alizon rushed along a lonely road towards Boggart's Clough. At first she thought of going to a cabstand, but that she realised would court publicity. The cabman would almost be sure to recognise her; besides, she would gain but little time that way. Under ordinary circumstances she would not have dared to have wandered along this lonely lane in the dark, but she thought nothing of the darkness now. It is true her heart beat wildly, and she dreaded meeting the tramps who were constantly prowling around, but she hurried on through the darkness, and prayed that she might be able to undo the evil she had unwittingly done.

What would Father Sheen say? she wondered. Would he applaud her? Surely he would, for though he dreaded the debate, he was an honourable man. And yet she did

not feel quite sure. She had heard him say that any tool was good enough to fight the devil with.

Well, was it not true? Why should she worry? Let the rough men who loved their faith carry out their clumsily conceived plot. It was suggestive of an Adelphi melodrama, but what of that? They were sincere, they were loyal to their Church, and they believed they were doing God service.

But she discarded the suggestion the moment it was born in her brain. The blood of an English lady ran in her veins. The Nevilles had always been known as an honourable race.

It was a weary journey. The road was dark and muddy, and was flanked on either side with rough stone fences. Here and there she saw the leafless branches of a stunted tree, while in the distance she could dimly see the dark elms among which the Priory nestled. Her mother would be anxiously awaiting her, but it did not matter. The great question was whether she would be able to overtake Duncan before he reached Boggart's Clough, and before the rough men would be able to work their will on him. She did not like him, for he was an enemy to her faith, but she would do her best. The wind soughed across the wild waste of moorland which stretched away above her, and moaned among the branches of the stunted trees, while stories of saints which she had heard from her earliest childhood came back to her with great vividness.

One of them almost caused her to give up her mission. It told of a lovely girl who was betrothed to a man who was not true to his Church, and who had formed plans to destroy the power of the priests. When she went to the Confessional, the priest told her that if she would receive absolution she must find out her lover's plans, and tell him. She did this, and her lover was killed by the authorities of

the Church. Nevertheless, priests, cardinals, and Pope applauded her, the Blessed Virgin herself appeared to her. Her life was a great benediction, and when she died the angels sung around her death-bed. She was created a saint too, and thousands of pilgrims visited her shrine yearly.

And yet she, Alizon Neville, a daughter of the Church, a Church which was despised in Protestant England, was even now trying to help an enemy, trying to make it possible for him to destroy her faith. No, it could not be right, and she stopped suddenly.

Again she went on, however. The God of truth could never commend an evil plot. He could never condemn her for performing an action which her heart told her was worthy of the name she bore. She might dislike him, he might be an enemy to her faith, but she could not connive at any action which was cruel and vulgar.

Presently she came to Boggart's Clough. She had seen nothing of Duncan, she had heard no sound. Her way now would be along an indistinct footpath towards Croft Farm. What should she say when she overtook him? How could she excuse the action of those of her faith? There was little time to think of these things now, however, her great work was to find him, to warn him.

A little later, she saw in the gloom of the night what she took to be the outbuildings of the farm, and a moment after she heard the sound of voices. Her heart beat even more quickly; in a few minutes she should know whether her mission had been successful.

Yes, that was Rutland's voice, high-pitched and almost angry.

"Kindly let me pass," he said, "a dying man awaits me yonder, and I must see him."

"Ther's noa dyin' man yon, mester," was the reply;

"that was nobbut a trick. 'Appen yo' did'n' think yo' was sich a fool."

"What do you mean?"

"Aw main as aa thaa'lt noan spaik in th' Industrial 'all to-neet."

"Oh, I see, this is a plot to keep me away from the meeting."

"Ca' it what yo' plaise, mester. The devil's noan goin' to 'ave it all his oan way."

"But I shall go to the meeting," cried Duncan, "and it's at your peril you try to stop me."

The men laughed in a low, cruel way.

"And this is the way you Catholics defend your faith, I suppose?" said Rutland, almost losing control over himself.

"Ony trick is gooid eno' to chait the devil," was the reply. "Naa then, lads, is all ready?"

Alizon Neville had been creeping nearer to them all the time, and just as she came up she saw two men lay hands on Rutland.

"Thou'll noan be sa keen baat tellin' lees abaat th' Cathlicks ageean," she heard one say savagely, with an oath. "Here, mester, 'ere's summat for yo' to sup."

"No, no!" cried Rutland; "take your hands from me."

"Thaa mun 'ave it," was the reply. "To-morra all't Lynford 'll know that Tudor parson wur druffen (drunk) to-neet."

"Stop, stop," cried Alizon, scarcely realising what she was saying.

"What's yon?" was the cry, "by gum, it's a lass; be quick or we shall be found aat."

"Stop," cried Alizon again, "how dare you do such a thing? Shan Kelly, is that you? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

A whisper passed among the men. "It's Miss Alizon," they said, "but aw thot oo was all right."

"Let Mr. Rutland go," continued Alizon; "if you don't your names shall be known, and every one of you shall be punished. I shall tell Father Sheen, too."

There was a laugh half of derision and half of anger.

"Is this the way you defend your faith?" cried the angry girl. "Is this your idea of being true Catholics?"

"We're ony doin' what you wanted," said one of the men sullenly.

"If I have given a wrong impression I am sorry," cried the girl. "I never dreamed that you would interpret my words in such a way. Leave Mr. Rutland alone, or it shall be worse for you."

The men stood undecided.

"Do you think," went on Alizon, "that if you do what you intended, that your purposes will be accomplished? I tell you I will go right back to the meeting and relate exactly what has taken place."

She had no fear of these men. Perhaps her position gave her a sense of safety, perhaps she felt certain that they loved her. Anyhow, she was not afraid, and she stood in their midst without manifesting a shadow of timidity. As for Rutland, he scarcely realised what the episode meant, but he felt perfectly assured of his freedom from harm. The girl's presence was an impregnable barrier between him and danger, and while at first he felt angry with his would-be persecutors, he now became calm and considerate.

"I should like to know what this means?" he said. "What harm have I done to you?"

"It is my fault," cried Alizon, before the man had a chance to reply, and then she hesitated, for she scarce knew what to say.

"Your fault!" cried Duncan, "your fault, Miss Neville! Why, you have stopped these fellows from venting their anger on me."

"My fault," repeated the girl eagerly, "so let me bear all blame."

"I do not understand," answered Duncan, bewildered.

"I will tell you," she replied. "I made use of words which these men have misunderstood, and—and——"

She hesitated a second; but Duncan understood her. He remembered the confused hints of the colliers, and rapidly piecing the various items of the episode he saw what it meant. Perhaps the fact that Alizon Neville was a high-born, beautiful girl influenced him to do what he would not have otherwise done, or it might have been that a true, chivalrous nature expressed itself. Anyhow, before Alizon could conclude what she was trying to say his mind was made up.

"I beg you will say no more, Miss Neville," he cried. "I understand everything. I thank you very much for troubling to come so far to save me from the results of an entire misunderstanding. As for these fellows, they may accept my assurance that nothing more will be heard about the matter."

The girl turned towards him gratefully, and in spite of the anger she felt towards him, she could not help admiring him. The men, however, could not understand so clearly.

"Dost a main that thou'lt say nowt to th' bobbies?" said one.

"I mean that no word concerning the matter shall pass my lips to any one," said Duncan. "It was a mistake, and this shall be the end of it as far as I am concerned."

Possibly his words, freeing them from all fear of punishment, quelled their anger, and led them to give up their

idea of doing him physical injury, even more than Alizon's presence. Poor, simple fellows, they were not bad-hearted, and they believed they would be serving their faith, by making it impossible for Duncan to speak at the meeting. Now, however, they almost forgot their plans, and a more gentle feeling came into their hearts.

Thoroughly ashamed of themselves, they slunk away. Most likely they were really glad that their plans had been frustrated, for they were not really vicious. Indeed, when they knew that Alizon disapproved of what they were doing, all their eagerness had departed, while Duncan's words made it impossible for them to harm him.

"Yon's a gradely lad when all's said and done," remarked one presently.

"Yi," said another, "oo's noan so bad. Art a baan to go to th' 'All to-neet?"

"Noa, awm noan baan."

And then they walked along through the darkness of the night without speaking another word.

Meanwhile, Alizon and Rutland stood watching them as they went away.

"Thank you, Miss Neville," said Rutland. "Will you allow me to accompany you to the Priory? I shall then be in plenty of time for the meeting."

"You are very kind," she replied, and with many wild thoughts surging in her mind she walked away by his side.

CHAPTER VIII

DUNCAN RUTLAND'S VICTORY

"**M**R. RUTLAND," said Alizon, when they had walked some distance together, "I must tell you exactly what has taken place."

"Pray don't worry," was Rutland's reply; "besides, it is unnecessary: I know. It will only distress you to dwell on it."

"You know! How?"

"It requires but little penetration to see what it all means," replied the young man. "Let us drop the whole matter; it is not worth dwelling on."

"But it is," cried the girl, "and it is due to those men that I tell you."

"It was all a mistake, I am sure. For my own part I only think of one aspect of this night's adventure."

"And that?" queried Alizon eagerly.

"Your courage, your heroism," cried Duncan fervently. "I know what it meant; that is, I know what it must have cost you to come through the dark night, along a lonely road, to render service to one whom you regard as an enemy to your faith."

"Yes, yes," was her answer, "but I could not help it, how could I? I—I, oh, I must tell you, I must! You were so cruel to Father Sheen last week, so bitter towards

our faith, Mr. Rutland, that I said, almost without thinking, that I wished something might happen to keep you away from the meeting to-night. One of those men heard me, and so——”

“You came all through the darkness to tell them of their mistake. It was wondrously generous of you, Miss Neville, and I thank you.”

“No, no, of course I could not help it, but——” she ceased speaking suddenly as though she was frightened at what she was about to say. “Can’t you see,” she went on presently, and her voice was husky with excitement, “can’t you see that you are fighting against God—by—by saying what you did last week? You were encouraging heresy, you were giving arguments to those who will use them as a means of keeping away from the Church. More, you were sowing the seeds of doubt and unrest in the minds of believers, you were doing untold harm! Can’t you see it, Mr. Rutland?”

The young man’s heart hardened at her words.

“No, I cannot see it,” he replied. “I can substantiate every word I uttered last week. I shall be able to do the same to-night. But let us not talk of that, it would be ungenerous of me.”

“Oh, please don’t think that what you call arguments have the slightest weight with me,” she cried with a sneer in her voice; “believe me, my faith is too surely grounded for that.”

“I was not thinking of that, Miss Neville, I was only thinking how ungenerous it would be of me, after your great kindness, to utter what would be to you rank heresy, and thus hurt your feelings.”

“But you will do so to-night.”

“That is a different matter. I shall be set for the defence of the faith that is in me; the people will have

come to hear both sides of the matter, and a man who is supposed to be skilled in such matters will be present to answer me. At present I can only think of you as a friend, a benefactor, who at great personal sacrifice has saved me from—I know not what. This is why I said let us speak of something else."

"But I cannot—I cannot. Believe me, I can think of nothing else. I—I know Father Sheen is not a good debater, and—and——"

"Truth always prevails, Miss Neville. God lives, and He never lets the truth suffer. You know what St. Paul said, 'We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.' Every false system will die a natural death. Nothing lives, except because of the truth that is in it, for God is Truth."

"Do you really believe that?" cried the girl impulsively.

"I am sure of it," replied the young man.

"But God uses us to help the truth," she said presently, "and woe be to us if we go against it."

"Truth is merciless," replied Duncan.

"Then for your own sake, for the sake of those who will be there, give up this debate," cried the girl impulsively.

"Will you be there?" asked Duncan.

"Yes, I shall be there. I hate the thought of going, but I must go. You have no idea what pain you gave last week?"

"To you, Miss Neville?"

"Yes, to me, and to my mother, and to Father Sheen," cried the girl impulsively, little realising what she was saying.

"I am very sorry," replied Duncan, "it grieves me to give you pain, but—but I cannot help it."

"Will nothing persuade you?" cried the girl.

"Nothing."

She said not another word till they reached the Priory, and then without a word, save a chilling "Good-night," she left him alone.

The young man walked towards Lynford thinking deeply. "I am afraid this night's experience has unfitted me for a mental conflict," he thought, "and it is hard to say what will give pain, but——"

"Is that yo', Mester Rutland?"

"It is, Matthy," replied the young man to the query of the old weaver.

"Ee—aw'm reight glad. Aw've jist bin to yar lodgins, and when Mrs. Nutter tow'd me wheer yo'd gone, aw was feared, aw was, fur sure."

"Ah well, it's all right. You've brought down the books?"

"Yi, they're on th' platform by naa. Doant yo' be maily-maathed, Mester, yo' gi' et to 'em 'ot. Lots on us ev bin prayin' for yo'."

"Thank you, Matthy."

A few minutes later Duncan found himself in the ante-room of the Industrial Hall, where he tried to read his notes, but try as hard as he might he could not keep the words of Alizon Neville from ringing in his ears, while her face kept constantly coming between his eyes and the words he had written.

"I shall be a dead failure to-night," he thought sadly.

A few minutes later Father Sheen came into the room accompanied by some of his supporters. The old man looked pale and ill. His eyes were rheumy and bloodshot. His cheeks were flabby, his lips blue. Evidently he much feared the encounter, and ought rather to be in bed than at such a meeting. Just before the time for the commencement of the debate, Lady Neville and Alizon entered the room. Duncan knew that both had seen him, but neither

paid him the slightest attention. Instead, they both talked pleasantly with the old priest. The young man felt depressed, and altogether uneasy. He was ill-prepared for his work. Although Alizon had done her best to nullify her thoughtless words to Shan Kelly, they had more effect than she wot of. They had led to events which had a very disturbing effect on the sensitive, highly-strung young man. Still he never thought of giving up. He would fight the business to the bitter end, and presently, when the chairman led the way on to the platform, he followed him with a steady step.

According to the rules of the debate, Duncan had to speak first on the second night, and as he saw the sea of upturned faces he felt that he had nothing to say. After all, why should he give pain? Why should he speak against a faith which had comforted millions? why should he earn the enmity of the girl with whom he had been thrown into contact so strangely?

When the chairman for the evening arose to reiterate the rules of the debate, and in so doing mentioned his name, he heard, in addition to the cheering, an angry muttering, and he wondered if many there were disappointed at his appearance. This somewhat aroused the fighting element within him, but when he rose to speak he felt that in spite of the enthusiastic applause of his friends, he was ill-prepared for his work.

Still he stammered his way through his speech, and when the half-hour was at an end, sat down without having said anything of much importance. There was no life in his words, no conviction in his tones; the address was a failure. Evidently Father Sheen felt this, for he rose with alacrity and confidence. His fearfulness had departed, his faith rose triumphant. Through the week the old priest had been reading largely of Cardinal Wiseman's addresses,

he had also studied Newman carefully, and he had something to say. As the old man proceeded, moreover, he became more at ease, his Celtic fervour manifested itself, his words came fluently, and his benignant presence helped his cause.

His peroration, too, was in its way fine. He described the Catholic Church united in its great Head, the Vicegerent of Jesus Christ, and showed how this fact had kept the Church through the centuries. How that, in spite of stress and storm, enemies without, and enemies within, the Church had marched forward. He told of the noble martyrs she had nurtured; in burning words he described the deeds of heroic souls, deeds of men who were beacon lights before Protestantism began to be.

"And is all this," he cried, "to be put aside for the puny arguments of a fledgeling boy, who has only just begun to tread the pathway of life, and who happens to be the minister of a so-called Church which forms a part of a sect, of a sect, which at some time or another broke away from some other sect, because of some particular fad of some particular man?"

He played upon this with rollicking Irish humour, and then, with a passionate appeal, which contained a sneer for Duncan, he sat down amidst loud applause.

So far Father Sheen had had the best of the debate. He knew it, Duncan knew it, and the audience knew it. The young minister felt his blood surge madly through his veins as he thought of it, and turning, his eyes met those of Alizon Neville. He saw the look of joyful triumph that shone there. To him the girl's look was a taunt, a sneer, a scornful challenge, while the tumultuous shouts all over the hall told him of his defeat.

Perhaps all this was the best thing that could have happened for Rutland. It put him on his mettle, it made

him eager to answer. He forgot Alizon Neville's appeal, and remembered only her look of scorn; the experiences of the night had lost their power. Facts which he had forgotten came back to him, arguments which had evaded him, fastened themselves on his memory, and every vestige of hesitation had departed. He was able to master himself too, so that the very derisive laughter of his opponents sharpened his wits, and made his language more cutting and virile.

If his first speech was a failure, the second fully atoned for it, and the fact was fully appreciated by the audience. His youthful appearance helped him, too. There was something more than usually striking in the thought that this beardless young man was doing battle with an old warrior. His cheeks were flushed with eagerness, his eyes flashed fire, and every gesture of his lithe young form added to the effect of his words. From the body of the hall he looked only a lad of nineteen, and yet he uttered words which swayed the throng of hard-headed men and women as the branches of trees are swayed by a strong wind.

He tore Father Sheen's arguments to pieces and then threw the fragments from him. He showed that instead of unity there was discord, and gave hard, irrefutable facts to prove that one infallible Pope had denied the pronouncements of another infallible Pope. He described how one Pope gave a version of the Bible to the world as absolutely free from error, and uttered an anathema upon any who should seek to alter it, and yet another Pope immediately succeeding him, had discovered innumerable errors in it, only to give the Church another so-called infallible version. He quoted instance after instance where Popes who were the vilest and most cruel of men, had connived at the basest of lies, and sanctioned

the most bloody deeds. With fine humour, biting, sarcastic epigrams, and burning eloquence, he concluded an address which undermined the old priest's words, and left him, from an argumentative standpoint, bruised, bleeding, and helpless.

"By Jove," said the young lawyer who had been present the week before, and who had listened to the speech from the standpoint of a barrister seeking to convince a jury, "it's unanswerable. I thought he was going to turn out a frost to-night, but it's the best thing he's done so far."

"It's a pity the chap isn't Lancashire," replied the manufacturer to whom he spoke; "if he were, I'd try and get him to resign Tudor and stand as our next member. The fellow would make his mark in the House of Commons."

"I'd rather see him a barrister," was the young solicitor's rejoinder,

The speech affected no one, however, as it affected Father Sheen. The old man, after listening to Duncan's first speech, had calculated upon an easy victory; this had given him confidence and freedom of utterance. Now he felt completely nonplussed. Having no skill as a debater, and not being able, as many clever men do who have a weak cause, to fasten upon side issues and make them appear principles, he left Duncan's words completely unanswered, and proceeded to give the second speech he had prepared. The hard-headed Lancashire audience felt this, and as Duncan saw Alison Neville's face, he knew that she felt it too. She was keen-minded and well educated, and prejudiced as she was in favour of her father-confessor, she could not help seeing that in spite of her hopes the battle was going against the cause she loved. Her face was drawn as if by pain, and tears of bitter disappointment came into her eyes. She hated Duncan more than ever, but she could

not help seeing that he was far more than a match for the old priest. For a moment she almost wished that she had allowed the men to work their will with him at Boggart's Clough that night; but this was only for a second. Even although her cause suffered, it could not have been right to allow cruelty and treachery to triumph.

Father Sheen did not even occupy his half-hour. The old man's mind was confused, and as he heard the murmurs of derision at some of his statements he forgot what he was saying and stammered piteously.

When he sat down, the audience felt that although the debate was only half through, the real issues were settled. Father Sheen had utterly stumbled at Duncan's statements proving that Papal Infallibility was an insult to the intelligence, a violation of the known facts of history, and an impious fraud.

When Duncan rose to give his final address he was met with tumultuous applause calculated to turn a young man's brains. At the same time he heard angry mutterings, and saw dark, vengeful faces, and he knew that but for the presence of a large body of police he would be in great danger. Even as it was he knew that he would in future have to watch his every action closely, for he had made many enemies.

But whatever his failings, cowardice was not one of them, and so he faced the people a third time with a clear light in his eyes, and spoke to them with an unfaltering voice.

"To bring this matter to a head," he said, "I purpose to conclude the debate for to-night by confining the question to one main issue, and if Father Sheen will deal with this issue honestly and fairly we shall go far to settle the question. Let us take the passage in the New Testament on which this great superstructure of the dogma of Papal Infallibility is built."

He then quoted the words of Jesus Christ concerning Peter, and the Rock on which He should build the Church.

On this passage the doctrine of the Papacy was built, and the Roman Church had claimed that Peter's powers had been transmitted to the succeeding Popes ever since. He then went on to show that for three hundred years, not one writer had ever ventured to quote these words as applying to the Bishop at Rome, not one Pope had ever used it as applying to himself; rather the great writers of the first three centuries had shown that it had an entirely different application. Then, in order to establish its claim the Roman Church had in later years issued certain manuscripts, called the Clementine Homilies and the Isidorial Decretals. These pretended to show that there had been a continuous succession of Bishops back to the time of Peter. The later Popes had accepted these Homilies and Decretals, and had placed their imprimatur upon them. Now every scholar admitted that both the Homilies and Decretals were forgeries. And thus infallible Popes had again and again declared true, what had been again and again proved to be forgeries and lies.

These facts Duncan stated clearly and concisely, and so simply that the most ignorant in the hall could follow him, and as he did so a great hush settled upon the crowd. Father Sheen looked steadily at his shoes, while both Lady and Alizon Neville watched the old man's face with evident pain.

"I will not enlarge on this," said Duncan in conclusion, "neither will I dwell upon the fact that there have been in the history of the Church rival Popes, sometimes one being in power and sometimes another. I will not urge the fact that one or more of these rival Popes must have been false, and that thus their ordinations must have been equally false,

I will simply press this fact upon Father Sheen. Let him prove the continuity of the succession, let him prove that the assumption of the Papacy does not rest upon acknowledged forgeries and lies ! ”

An abler man might have bolstered up something like a case. He might, like a popular priest who is related to a great dignitary, have pleaded that it was not likely that millions of people through hundreds of years would have been mistaken, he might have poured forth turgid rhetoric ; but Father Sheen was utterly crushed. He was not a reader of Church history, he was unable to refute Duncan's arguments ; and when he sat down after uttering some feeble expletives, he knew that the Catholic faith had been but miserably defended. He knew that much might have been said, only he was unable to say it, and he felt with sorrow that even the adherents of his Church would go away confused and unsettled in their minds.

“ Won't you go down with us to the Priory for a light supper and a little gossip ? ” asked Lady Neville kindly ; “ you have eaten scarcely anything for days, and a change will do you good. I will tell Jenkins to drive you home. ”

But the old man shook his head sadly. “ I am not well, Lady Neville, ” he said.

Duncan watched them as they left the platform, and as they neared the door he caught a look from Alizon Neville. The girl's eyes fairly blazed with anger.

“ Mother, I hate him, ” she said to Lady Neville as they drove up to the Priory door. “ He may be clever, I am afraid he is, but I hate him. He will do untold harm to our Church. ”

“ The issue is in God's hands, my darling, ” replied her ladyship ; “ let us pray for His help. ”

CHAPTER IX

THE COMING OF FATHER RITZOOM

THE next day Father Sheen's failure was the talk of the town, while Duncan woke to find himself, as far as Lynford was concerned, famous. Towards evening it was rumoured that Shan Kelly and a few others had conceived a plot against him, and that but for Alizon Neville he would have had vitriol thrown on him. The day after a host of garbled stories were discussed in the mills, each of which made the young minister a hero ; and when the Saturday's newspaper appeared it contained, in addition to the report of the debate, a summary of the stories concerning his adventure at Boggart's Clough. A reporter had called on him, but he absolutely refused to speak a word concerning the matter, and this fact was also duly recorded. Altogether the town was in a ferment.

The debate was the topic of conversation in three-fourths of the homes of the town, it was fervently discussed in public-houses, while a special song had been written and sung at one of the music halls.

As for Father Sheen, he had kept inside his house. No one had seen him. The young priest who acted as curate had to do all the pastoral work, and in nearly every case had done his best to prove his opinion that Duncan was an ignorant clown. This young man had even hinted to

his superior that it might be well if the onus of the discussion were transferred to his own shoulders, as he felt quite sure he could, to use his own words, "turn the tables entirely."

But the old man had not listened to his curate ; instead, he had sat quietly in his own study thinking much as to what should be done.

When he opened the Saturday's newspapers and saw the report concerning the plot against the young minister his heart sunk like lead. Much as he hated heresy he loathed the thought of such an act. He was a kind-hearted, honourable old gentleman, who scorned to do a deed of meanness. Down deep in his heart, while he was angry with Rutland, he admired him for the stand he had taken. He bore him no grudge, and if occasion occurred, he would have done him a kind action. The young minister had kept entirely free from personalities, and his language had been fair and chivalrous throughout the whole debate. The old priest had, moreover, commanded the Catholics to take no violent steps, and to use no menacing language. He had been dragged into this debate against his will ; but he wanted to live at peace and concord with all men.

"This will do untold harm," he thought as he read the news. "I must talk with Alizon about it. Anyhow, I am glad that it was a Catholic who warned him of his danger."

Then he read the report of the debate and noted the editorial comments.

"I daren't meet that audience again," he thought sadly, "I daren't. It's a subject which will be even harder to deal with than the others. 'The right of Private Judgment,' why, Rutland can do almost anything with it in speaking to a Lancashire audience ; almost anything. Oh, I'm not the man for it, I know I am not ! But what can I do ?"

He thought long and carefully, then he started up suddenly.

"That is it," he cried; "that is it. He can see me through this business. I am glad I thought of it!"

He seized a telegraph form and wrote hastily:—

"Father Ritzoom, College of St. Joseph of Arimathea, Dublin.

"Come here immediately. Most urgent. Wire time I may meet you.

"SHEEN."

This missive he sent away hurriedly, and afterwards threw himself into an arm-chair with a contented smile upon his face.

"Yes, Ritzoom will see me through this," he thought. "Ritzoom can see a man through anything. He's as clever as St. Benedict, and as full of plans. I'll not trouble any more; oh, I am glad to be rid of the whole business. But he may not be at the college, he may not be able to come! I hope and pray he can. Anyhow, I'll not worry; I'll go down to the Priory and have a chat with Alizon and her ladyship."

When he reached the Priory he found Lady Neville reading the *Lynford Observer*, while Alizon stood near her, eagerly looking at the books on the library shelves.

"I am glad to see you," said Lady Neville, "very glad. I wish to talk with you."

"Oh, I am glad to come," cried Father Sheen, "I have been so worried. I've neither been able to sleep nor eat. That debate—that debate has been like a nightmare to me."

"Has been. Why, it is not finished yet."

"Oh yes, it is as far as I am concerned."

"How?"

"I could not go on with it, Lady Neville, I simply could not. My brain is all of a whirl. I am getting to be an old man, and I am not able to bear excitement. Besides, our

opinion concerning that last subject, '*The Right of Private Judgment*,' is not the kind of thing that goes down with Lancashire people."

Lady Neville had felt this as keenly as Father Sheen had felt it, and had thought of writing him concerning the matter.

"But what are you going to do?"

"I have telegraphed for Father Ritzoom to come and see me."

"What, Ritzoom the Jesuit?"

"Yes. He's the cleverest man I know, and I—I think he likes me."

"Of course he likes you, every one does; but I am not sure that I——" she stopped suddenly, evidently deeming it unwise to complete the sentence.

"He'll see me through this—if he can come."

"Do you anticipate that he will take your place in the debate?"

"Yes, I expect so. I really am ill, Lady Neville; such another night as last Wednesday would kill me. I can explain in Wednesday morning's papers, that being physically unfitted for the work, I have asked a friend to take my place. You see it is not as though I hadn't done my best, I've not shown myself a coward—and—and I'm an old man."

"I think you have acted wisely," replied her ladyship; "but however clever Father Ritzoom may be, I'm afraid the mischief's done."

"In what way?"

"Well, you see, the people will say that you've been obliged to call in an outsider; besides, that affair at Boggart's Clough will not tell in our favour."

"I never heard of it till this morning. What is the exact truth about this matter?"

Alizon, who had been listening intently to what had been

said, now joined in the conversation, and told Father Sheen exactly what had happened.

"It seems that some of our people must have blurted out the story themselves," remarked the priest, when she had finished.

"It would seem so."

"Just like them, just like them. If they had succeeded it would have come out all the same. What a mercy Alizon was in time; for if they had harmed Rutland in any way, the town would have gone wild. I must say, however, that the young fellow has behaved very well."

"I think so, too," remarked Lady Neville. "For my own part, although Alizon does not like him, I think he is a fine, gentlemanly young fellow. He's clever, too."

"Yes, he's clever," sighed Father Sheen, "there can be no doubt about that; and it was certainly good of him to refuse to say anything to the reporters. He could have made it appear that it was Alizon who incited Kelly and the rest of them; as it is, she will appear in an entirely different light."

"If they don't themselves tell the truth."

"Yes, yes; I must see to that. I'll call on them on my way back. Anyhow, Rutland seems all right."

"I hate him," cried Alizon hotly. She had not meant to have spoken, but the words escaped her before she was aware.

"Ah well, we must love our enemies, my child," remarked the old man, "and I think you have acted very nobly. But I must get back. I hope Ritzoom's telegram will await me at home."

"If Father Ritzoom comes, please bring him down," said Lady Neville.

"Thank you, I will. Oh, Ritzoom will turn the tables entirely. He's such a clever fellow. I shall have no fear if he can come. I wish I had thought of him before."

When Father Sheen reached his house after making a few calls he found a telegram awaiting him :—

"Cannot arrive before Monday night. Meet 6.10 train from Manchester."

"RITZOOM."

"Our Lady be praised!" ejaculated the old priest fervently. "I shall be able to enjoy my dinner to-day."

On the Monday evening Father Sheen was early at the station, and waited anxiously for the Manchester train to appear.

"Oh, I do hope nothing has happened to detain him," muttered the old man as it drew up to the platform. "Ah, there he is!"

As some of my readers may possibly have become acquainted with Father Ritzoom, I will not attempt to describe him here.* Indeed, such a task would not be at all easy, for he belonged to that class of man which defies description. Father Sheen felt this as he caught his outstretched hand. The older man somehow felt as though he were enveloped by a strange influence, an influence which made him hesitating and nervous.

"I'm so glad to see you," he said; "so glad. It is good of you to come. I hope you have had a pleasant journey."

"I really have not thought of it."

"Haven't you? I was afraid you would be cold and miserable."

"I'm hungry, if that's worth talking about."

"Oh, I've provided for that."

"I hope you have some good cigars, too. If you haven't I'll buy some on the way."

"No, don't. Good cigars are my one luxury, and I'm

* "The Scarlet Woman."

well stocked. Shall I get a cab, or will you walk back to the house? It will take us about ten minutes."

"I think I'd rather walk."

"That's right. I can tell you on the way why I've taken the liberty to send for you."

"I don't wish to hear anything about it."

"But—but——"

"Time enough for that. I'm hungry, and I want a smoke. I thought I had better not indulge in a pipe on the way. There were a good many people in the carriage, and some of them lived at Lynford, I gathered."

On the way Father Sheen talked incessantly, but nervously. It was easy to see that he was somewhat afraid of the man he had summoned to help him. Ritzoom, however, never spoke a word, nor did he seem to pay much heed to what Father Sheen was saying. Rather, he was closely scrutinising the people who passed him, and the town through which they walked.

Presently they came to the Catholic Church, when he lifted his hat reverently. He was dressed in ordinary clerical attire, having for the time discarded the Jesuit's distinctive dress.

"Do you live far from here, Sheen?"

"Not a very long distance."

"That is right;" and then he was silent until he had taken off his overcoat and hat, and sat in the old priest's study.

"Dinner is quite ready, Ritzoom."

"Thank Heaven."

The two men entered the dining-room, and Ritzoom ate heartily, but spoke scarcely a word. Once when Father Sheen began to refer to his reasons for summoning him to Lynford, he shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Let's enjoy dinner, Sheen," he said, "the whole night's before us, and you have plenty of cigars."

The older man sighed pathetically and went on eating. "I almost wish I hadn't asked him to come," he thought, "he makes me think of the picture of the devil playing chess with a man for his soul."

When dinner was over, however, and they sat down before the study fire, the Jesuit unbended somewhat.

"Let's have a look at your newspapers for these last two weeks," he said, as he lit his first cigar.

Father Sheen looked at him questioningly.

"The fellows were talking about it in the railway carriage," replied the Jesuit, answering the query in the other's eyes. "I saw the placards on the walls as we came along, too. Some announcing the debate, and others informing the public that full accounts were given of the same in the *Lynford Observer*. Let's see the papers."

The old priest gave them to him without a word, and then waited quietly while he scanned them. In three minutes he threw them aside with a gesture of impatience.

"This is the bother, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Father Sheen pathetically. "Let me tell you how the thing commenced."

"What's the use of that?—but stay, it may be of interest. Go on."

The priest told his story with a fair amount of precision. Here and there he wandered, as though the facts were not clear to his own mind, still he gave the Jesuit a fair idea of what had passed.

All the time he was speaking Ritzoom sat in a large arm-chair, smoking steadily. He never once opened his eyes, nor did a muscle of his face move. His large, square features were apparently in repose, as though the man had given himself entirely over to the luxury of smoking.

"And that is all!" he said presently.

"Yes; it is all I can remember."

The Jesuit went on smoking for several minutes in silence, his eyes still closed, his face as still as that of a statue.

"Well!" he said at length.

"I hope it is 'well,'" said Father Sheen with a feeble laugh. "I hope, too, that you'll take my place in the debate on Wednesday night?"

"I certainly shall not."

"Then I—I suppose I shall have to—to—meet him myself unless—that is——" he did not finish the sentence, but relapsed into silence, his chin resting heavily on his chest.

"I suppose you know what you've done?"

"No—that is——"

"Excuse me for speaking plainly, Sheen, but we are here alone. You've been a consummate ass in the matter. There, I take the liberty of an old friend."

"I am afraid I have," replied Father Sheen meekly; "I am afraid I have. My speeches were not to the point, and Rutland——"

"Your speeches were all right, better, indeed, than I thought you could give."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said the old man, evidently much pleased.

"But you were foolish to tackle him at all. Never any good resulted from a public debate yet. They have always made more perverts than converts. In this case the fellow evidently wiped the floor with you."

"I am afraid so."

"How old is Rutland?"

"About twenty-six, I'm told. He looks even younger."

"He seems a fellow capable of pathos, passion, humour eloquence."

"Yes, yes, all that."

"Highly sensitive, of an artistic temperament."

"Yes, certainly."

"He's capable of realising the historical spirit."

"Yes," replied Father Sheen, although he hardly knew what the Jesuit meant.

"You must not meet him on Wednesday night. No one must meet him, he must have a clear field."

"But—but that will never do. Think of what the town will say. I shall be a by-word, so will the Church."

"So much the better."

"I—I do not understand."

"I did not think you would. But that does not matter. Let him say his hardest things about us, let him prove us to be falsifiers of history, logic, common-sense, morality, everything good. The stronger his statements the better for us."

"I am utterly at a loss to know what you mean."

"Of course you are."

"But why will it be better for him to say all these things, while no one replies?"

"Because before they are forgotten he will in that very hall recant them, deny them, and pray Heaven to forgive him for saying them! Then all his sayings will recoil upon the Protestants, and tell in our favour, and there will be a large ingathering into our Church."

"But how can this be?"

"Oh, easily!"

"But that will mean that he will have to be converted."

"Exactly."

"Oh, but you do not know him. He is a Protestant every inch of him. He is a student of history, he laughs at our claims, ridicules the Pope, and holds up our doctrines to contempt. And mind, it will take a clever man to prove him in the wrong. I really did not think that Protestants

had such a strong case. You see, they will not accept the authority of the Church to begin with."

"Of course not, and that is where you made a fool of yourself by arguing with him. But it does not matter; indeed, we will turn it all to our advantage. He is young, he will be converted."

"But who will convert him? You?"

"No;" and the Jesuit laughed quietly.

"Who, then?"

"A woman!"

"A woman! What woman?"

"You must be dense not to guess. You will know soon. I must see him. But it will be all right. I have not studied men a quarter of a century for nothing, and as surely as my name is Anthony Ritzoom, of the Society of Jesus, it will be as I say."

CHAPTER X

FATHER RITZOOM'S PLANS

FATHER SHEEN stared at the Jesuit like one demented. Being but a simple-minded old gentleman, and knowing little of Jesuitical sophistry, he could not see his way through the subtle windings of the other's brains. He therefore waited, open-mouthed, for him to proceed.

Ritzoom lit his second cigar, and again closed his eyes, as though he were thoroughly enjoying himself.

"Whatever your taste in other matters, Sheen," he said, "in cigars it is beyond praise. These are simply splendid."

"Bother the cigars!" cried the old man, somewhat testily, "tell me what you mean."

"Surely you can see."

"No more than the dead."

"And yet as a Catholic priest you profess to be a student of human motives."

"But give me some clue."

"Clue! Why, Sheen, you are a child. Let me ask you a few other questions, and in so doing you will see what my plans are."

"Ask questions by all means."

"Well, first of all tell me about Rutland. You say he is twenty-six?"

"Yes."

"And minister of Tudor Chapel, which you say is the most important Nonconforming meeting-house in the town?"

"He has the largest, the most intelligent, and therefore the most influential congregation of any Church in the town. People of all sorts crowd to hear him."

"He is a scholar?"

"He is an M.A. of the London University. He took both his B.A. and M.A. during his six years at the Theological College at which he studied."

"A gentleman?"

"I should say so, certainly."

"And good-looking?"

"Yes, one of these distinguished-looking fellows. He is tall and lithe. His face is rather pale. He wears no beard, and his features are what you may call clean cut. He has a fine head of dark hair. He would be noticed in any crowd."

"He's not married, you say?"

"No. I hear he has no marriage entanglements. I suppose half the girls in his congregation worship him."

"Of course; but he is seemingly a pronounced bachelor?"

"Yes."

"Splendid. Nothing could be better. Nothing. And you say he is humorous, sensitive, and passionate?"

"If you had heard him you would have no doubt about it."

"You say he has met Miss Alizon Neville?"

"Of course. I told you of the affair of last Wednesday night. Alizon saved him from the anger of some of our people who were—very enthusiastic in the Church's cause."

"This Miss Alizon Neville is a faithful child of the Church?"

"I verily believe she would die for it."

"So I judge. It was she who incited you to give that series of addresses, and to accept Rutland's challenge?"

"It was," replied Father Sheen, sighing bitterly.

"What does she think of Rutland?"

"She hates him!"

"Good. She says so, does she?"

"Yes, she is very bitter towards him. Alizon, you know, thought I should be able to—to——"

"Wipe him out, as he wiped you out."

"Yes," replied the old man, lugubriously.

"And as a consequence was all the more bitterly disappointed at your failure."

"That's it."

"And now hates him like poison?"

"Yes. I never knew her feel so bitterly towards any one."

"How old is she?"

"About twenty, I think."

"Just so. I have never had the pleasure of meeting her. Of course, I know of the family. The Nevilles are among the few who remain true to the Church, in the important Houses of Lancashire. I should judge from what you say that she is an ardent Catholic, but of an inquiring mind. That she is impulsive, sometimes rather unreasonable, but still faithful to the Church. She almost worships you, I suppose?"

"I believe she is very fond of me, and trusts me implicitly. That is natural; I have been a friend of the family for over——"

"Yes, yes. Has her ladyship arranged for her marriage?"

"No, not definitely. As you know, that matter presents many difficulties. There are so very few eligible young Catholic gentlemen in these parts. And I am sure Alizon would not marry a heretic."

"Just so. I think you said she was good-looking?"

"A beautiful girl."

"High-spirited, well-educated, fairly widely read, fascinating, romantic."

"Yes, all that."

Ritzoom again sat with closed eyes for a few minutes, then he threw the cigar end into the fire and lit another. As he did so he laughed with evident enjoyment.

"This is splendid, Sheen," he said.

"Still—I—I don't understand you," stammered the old man.

"You will in a minute. Now, just another question. Lady Neville is a devoted daughter of the Church?"

"You know that, Ritzoom. She has been our chief stay and support in the town. She is one of the very few important persons of our faith in the district. She pays for two nurses, she has built a convent, she gives large sums of money for our work every year. The whole Church has no truer child than she."

"Yes, I knew all this pretty well, but I wished to be perfectly sure. Women are peculiar creatures, and sometimes change without apparent reason. But all is well, all is well. These are really fine cigars, Sheen," and again the Jesuit closed his eyes, and blew huge volumes of smoke from his mouth.

"But what—what are you driving at, Ritzoom? Why have you asked all these questions?"

"To get you out of your scrape, and to win a host of converts to the faith."

"But how?"

"Well, I will tell you. Things must take their course on Wednesday; but you must not attend. You say there is a mid-weekly paper, and you must pen a few lines, or I will for you, saying that in obedience to the commands of your medical adviser you had to stay at home."

"That will be perfectly right ; my doctor has forbidden my taking a further part in the debate. But I shall be the laughing-stock of the town."

"No more than you have been ; and even if you are, it cannot be helped."

"Then you go and say a few words. Ask a few questions in your own peculiar way."

"I had thought of that, but it will not do. I am a stranger, and Rutland will be fully primed. No, let him have his own way. He will have on¹ Protestants to speak to, that is if he sees fit for a meeting to be held."

"Oh yes, I see."

"Well, then, we must arrange for Rutland to be invited to the Priory."

"But why ?"

"Because he must fall in love with Miss Alizon Neville."

"Good heavens, man, you must be mad ! What good will that do ?"

"You will see presently. She must be very gracious with him. I also will meet him there again and again. We will show how kind we Catholics are in forgiving all the hard things he has said about us ; we will say nothing about our faith ; but it shall be presented to him in the most glowing colours. He shall see it at its best. It shall be represented to him in one of the finest old homes in England. He shall see it through the medium of refinement, culture, and an old name. More, he shall see it in the person of a beautiful, educated girl. And she shall be very winsome, very gracious. All the conversation he shall hear, shall lead him to see ideal Catholicism. He shall be overwhelmed by the greatness of our Church, he shall see the grandeur of our purposes, he shall understand the magnificence of our outlook, and everything shall be

beautiful to him because at every turn he will see the beautiful girl he will learn to love."

"And then?"

"He will be fascinated, bewildered. He will begin to compare the littleness of the paltry sects with our great Church. He will be touched by our antiquity, our tremendous history. I will be there to explain those dark periods of that history. Not ostensibly, but apparently by accident. And he will yield, he will as surely come to us as the traditional fly walked into the spider's parlour. All arguments of the ordinary nature will fail with him; I saw that by glancing at his speech. The critical faculty is strongly developed in him. But he is young, he is ardent, and he will fall under the spell of a woman's eyes."

"Well, go on."

"Sheen, there should be no need for me to go on. You are an Irishman, and not an Englishman, and thus should not need all these explanations. The marvel to me is how this blockheaded English race should have made such progress."

"Never mind the English race. Tell me the rest of your plans."

"Well, as I said, he will fall in love with your Miss Alizon Neville, he will become but as clay in her hands. He, in spite of his education, is a commoner, while she is the daughter of one of the oldest families in England. And mind you, the most democratic Englishman that ever breathed loves what is termed noble families. For a time he will flounder, and then, because she continues to be kind and gracious to him, he will make a confession of his love, will ask her to be his wife."

"And then?"

"Then! why she will tell him that she cannot wed an enemy to her faith."

"Naturally ; but afterwards ?"

"Then all our preparatory work will take effect, and presently he will resign his position at Tudor Chapel. After that he will declare himself a convert."

"My word, Ritzoom !"

"After that you will have a great day at Lynford, for this skilled opponent of yours, this man who has, from an argumentative view, used you as a mop, will stand up in that very hall, before the assembled thousands, and declare himself a convert to the Catholic faith."

"That is fine, but if he were to marry Alizon—I say 'if,' because she is the centre not only of your hopes but of your difficulties—if he were to marry Alizon, I say, the people would say that he renounced his faith only to marry a rich and noble woman. We should say the same if we lost any one under similar circumstances."

"But he will not marry her. When his declaration is made, she will refuse him."

"And then he will turn back again."

"No, he will not ; he dare not. And even if he did, his influence would be gone."

"Heavens, Ritzoom, I could never have dreamed of such a thing. Still, I see difficulties."

"Of course you do. I believe you must be an Englishman. Their great characteristic is that they see difficulties."

"But they overcome them. You can't deny that."

"Anyhow, what are your difficulties ?"

"First, you could not get Alizon to consent to such a plot. Even I dare not suggest it to her. She is the soul of honour, and were I to hint at such a thing I should lose influence with her. English Catholics are not like some of those on the Continent."

"Unfortunately they are not ; but in this case it does not matter. All she would be asked to do would be simply

to be kind and gracious. We should tell her that we wished to convert him, and that it is her duty to assist us. She will not think that we intend him to fall in love with her; she will never dream of it, and we must not hint at it."

"I see. And her ladyship?"

"Leave her to me. I will tell her all it is safe for her to know. I must understand her character. But I do not think it will be necessary for her to know. As a good Catholic, however, she will feel that it is her duty to convert the man who has proved such a formidable opponent to the Church in the town."

"Yes, she would, she would. Moreover, it is plainly her duty to assist us. Ritzoom, you are a genius!"

"Thank God I'm not an Englishman!" he said fervently.

The two men sat quietly for some time without further speech.

"And suppose Rutland falls in with your ideas?" broke in Father Sheen presently; "suppose everything turns out according to your plans, what is to become of him?"

"Impossible to tell until I've seen him. That is a mere detail. As you know, with us Jesuits the man is nothing, the truth is everything. Rutland is only a pawn on the chess-board. For the time he may seem a knight, a bishop, or what you like in the game we are playing. In reality, however, he is only a pawn, and pawns are not of the first importance."

"Still——"

"Oh yes, I quite understand you," said Ritzoom, as though he had fully divined what was in the other's mind. "From what you say, I should think he has the making of a priest in him. Once let us get him to renounce his faith, well, then we've got him. Of course it will be impossible for Miss Alizon Neville to marry him. It would never do. Nothing would be gained, and much lost, by such a course

of procedure. She will, she must refuse him, and then I should not be surprised if he, crushed, bewildered, heart-broken, does not seek to solace himself by entering the priesthood."

"If that could be done, it would be a wondrous triumph!" exclaimed Father Sheen.

"The more so, as, up to now, we can point to no single instance where a Nonconformist of any standing whatever has joined us. To convert a pronounced heretic, a Protestant champion, and to make him a priest—well, it should be paragraphed in every newspaper in England. I would see to that."

"Yes, yes," said Father Sheen, fairly carried away by enthusiasm. "It is a splendid scheme—splendid. All the more so because it is so natural, so simple. If well worked out it will atone for my shortcomings. Yes, Rutland must be invited to the Priory, where Lady Neville and Alizon must be kind. I am sure they will gladly, eagerly agree to it. And Rutland, he will be fascinated, charmed—exactly. But you will have to stay here a few weeks?"

"I can do no good at present, but later on I can give the matter just six weeks," said Ritzoom.

"Six weeks—can this be done in six weeks?"

"My part of the work can, easily. But understand, for the present I appear in your midst as a man of no importance. As such, too, I go to hear Rutland on Wednesday night."

"What! are you going to hear him?"

"Certainly. That is, I shall go if he decides to hold a meeting."

After this the two men sat for a long time talking, during which Father Ritzoom smoked many cigars.

CHAPTER XI

AT THE PRIORY

ON the following Wednesday morning, a letter appeared in the *Lynford Observer*, stating that, owing to medical advice, Father Sheen had yielded to the wishes of the authorities of his Church, and had decided not to take part in that night's debate. The letter was carefully worded, and a medical certificate appended, so that to an outsider it would seem as though the priest had, after much persuasion, foregone a duty which would have yielded him great pleasure. The inhabitants of the town, however, thought otherwise. Many jokes were passed in the factories, while many conjectures were offered as to the course things would take.

"I thowt Rutland gave Sheen a 'eadache last Wednesday nect; aw spoase oo's noan got ovver it yet," said old Matthy Bray, as he read the letter.

"Yi, aw spoase oo'l be sittin' in his arm-cheer wi' a vinegar cloth tied araand his 'ead," said the man to whom the old weaver spoke. "Weel, aw'm glad aw voated for Rutland comin' to Tudor. Oo's just the man for us."

"Yi, and so am I. Some foak said as aa oo wur too young. But aw seed as aa the lad 'ad gotten brains. Tell tha, lad, the chap as baits Rutland 'll 'ave to geet up middlin' early. Oo'll noan have mich time for breakfast."

"Thou'rt near right, Matthy; but sitha, wot's yon?"

The two men were on their way to dinner. They had just left the factory, and were passing through the principal street in the town.

The object which attracted their attention was a huge placard, announcing that as Father Sheen had declared that he would be unable to take part in the debate, and as nearly two thousand tickets were sold for the same, Mr. Rutland would give a Lecture on "The Right of Private Judgment in Religious Matters."

The weavers laughed gleefully as they read it.

"Oo's noan lost much time, Jonas," said Matthy Bray.

"Nay, the lad's made up his mind middlin' quick. Art a baan?"

"Yi, aw' am an' all, aw would'n miss it for summat. Aw doan't think mony people 'll stay away cause Sheen isn't coming."

"Except th' Cathlicks," remarked Jonas.

"Thou'rt reight, Jonas," said Matthy; "Cathlicks 'll noan coom to-neet. All th' same, th' 'All 'll be full."

"Yi, aw shall geet middlin' early."

As the weaver had predicted, the Hall was crowded, although no Catholics appeared on the platform, and, as far as could be judged, very few were in the main building. Only a few of the people noticed a dark, clean-shaven man, with large square features, who sat in the middle of the hall. Except that his face denoted remarkable strength, there seemed no reason for paying him particular attention. He was dressed in dark serge clothes, and his short, double-breasted coat accentuated the broad shoulders and powerful chest. He spoke no word to any one, but seemed to observe the character of the meeting closely.

When Rutland walked on to the platform, and the people rose *en masse* to cheer him, not a muscle of his face moved.

but his keen, dark eyes were fixed on the young minister, as though he were much interested in him. Throughout Rutland's address the man noted his every movement, listened to every word he uttered, and marked with evident interest the impression he made upon the audience. The people laughed, cheered, shouted, and became indignant, scornful, and enthusiastic in turn; but this man never altered the expression of his face. That he was interested no one could doubt; but what he thought of the eager young speaker who swayed the multitude at will, no one could gather. He was as silent as the Sphinx, and his face was as immovable.

When the lecture was over, a man who was sitting next to him spoke in a friendly way, characteristic of Lancashire people.

"Yo're a stranger to Lynford, aw reckon?" he said.

"Yes," was the answer.

"Aw doan know wot th' Cathlicks will say after to-neet," remarked the Lynford man. "Rutland's fairly showed up the result of priests tryin' to hinder people thinkin' baat religious matters."

"He has, indeed," said the stranger.

"That lecture 'll be a reg'lar knock-downer for Father Sheen, an' all th' Cathlicks, won't it?"

The man did not reply, but rose and left the hall, not deigning to listen to the men who got up to propose a vote of thanks to Duncan for the valiant stand he had taken. He walked some distance down the street, when, hearing the Town Hall clock chiming, he turned and looked in that direction.

"A quarter past nine," he said. "I shall be in good time."

He went to a cabstand and entered one of the conveyances.

"The Priory," he said quietly.

A little later the cab drew up before the entrance of Lady Neville's old home.

Evidently the visitor was expected, for he was immediately ushered into the room where Lady Neville and Alizon sat, together with Father Sheen.

"You are back early," said Father Sheen.

"Yes, I came away as soon as Rutland had finished his lecture."

"Well, and what was your impression of him, Father Ritzoom?" asked Lady Neville.

The Jesuit was silent for a few seconds. He looked at the two ladies, and at Father Sheen, as though he wondered what had passed between them during the evening.

"I think it is a great pity that a man possessing such talents should remain outside the Church," he replied.

"It is, indeed," remarked Lady Neville; "but what can be done with him?"

"Can't you think?" asked Ritzoom, eyeing the occupants of the room keenly.

"I wish I could," she replied.

"It is no use denying the matter, he has struck our Church a heavy blow," remarked Father Sheen pathetically.

Alizon said nothing, but listened eagerly to what was said.

"Father Ritzoom," said Lady Neville, "I wish you could think of some means whereby the harm he has done could be nullified."

"It would be better still if it could be made to render us good service," remarked the Jesuit quietly.

"Yes, yes, of course; but that seems impossible."

"Didn't you think him conceited, pedantic, and—and arrogant to-night, Father Ritzoom?" asked Alizon somewhat impatiently.

"Perhaps, slightly," replied the Jesuit, "but not unduly

so. I remember that he is a young man, and that the applause of the multitude was enough to make him a little—well, over certain.”

“Was his lecture able?” asked Father Sheen.

“It was a very dangerous address, a *very* dangerous address,” was the reply. “It appealed to those qualities which are characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race.”

“And they?” asked Alizon.

“They may be all summed up in a word, self-importance. He played upon this, flattered it, fostered it, glorified it. He made the authority of God’s ordained priests a very difficult matter. I should not be surprised if many of Father Sheen’s flock go astray.”

“Oh, it’s a shame, a shame!” cried Alizon hotly. “Cannot something be done? It makes one long for the power of the Inquisition.”

“Yes, it helps one to understand some of those deeds which Protestants make so much of. But we are in England, and we are but a weak, struggling people here. We want a new Reformation.”

“And that seems impossible,” remarked Lady Neville.

“Pardon me, I think not,” remarked the Jesuit quietly.

“You think not,” cried her ladyship, somewhat astonished. “I hope you may be right; but I see no loophole anywhere. I had hoped that this debate would have helped us; but instead of that, it seems as though the enemies of the Church are triumphant. Whatever we may think, it is generally accepted that the Protestants have won all along the line. Could you not, Father Ritzoom, answer him? You are skilled in all these matters.”

“It is a great mistake to think that these great subjects can be dealt with on the public platform amidst clamour and excitement,” replied the Jesuit. “The holy St. Paul tells us that spiritual things are spiritually discerned. It is

not arguments that will win converts, but grace. In one sense this debate has been a colossal mistake ; still I trust we may use it as a weapon which will vanquish the enemies of the Church, and win numberless converts."

"But how?" cried Alizon.

"By converting Mr. Rutland," said Ritzoom quietly.

He had seen that Father Sheen had been discreetly silent during his absence, and thus he was able to introduce his plans in his own way.

"Convert Mr. Rutland?" cried the girl.

"Just that, Miss Alizon."

"Impossible."

"Is the grace of God confined, Miss Alizon? Is the power of the Church limited?" said the priest, fixing his eyes steadily upon the girl. "Here is a great work for us all! By leading him into the fold, we save his own soul from hell, and we save all those who will follow him. I can see in that young man a possible defender of faith; I can see him pleading for the very things he has condemned; I can see him in that very hall denying the things he has proclaimed, and telling his present congregation that their only hope is in our Holy Church."

The Jesuit spoke in low, impressive tones, and the girl felt that he had cast a kind of spell upon her. For the moment she seemed to have no will but his. He seemed to possess a kind of mesmeric power.

"If it could only be," she murmured.

"It can, if you, Miss Alizon, and you, Lady Neville, will help," said the priest.

"As far as our help is concerned," said her ladyship, "of course you can depend on it; still, I cannot quite see how it is to be done. He is a pronounced heretic, a militant heretic, and what is more, he is an educated man."

"He is a heretic, Lady Neville, because he has never

really understood the Church. He has never seen it, therefore he does not know it. He has been reared in an atmosphere in which we are regarded as enemies to God. He has been fed upon Protestant history. Let him feel the lies of Protestantism ; let him feel the truth of the Church."

"Yes, but how? Where?"

"Here."

"Here!" cried her ladyship in astonishment.

"Yes, here; let him see our religion where such as he should see it; let him feel its power in a refined, beautiful home; let him see it expressed in beautiful lives; let him breathe the atmosphere which ever pervades this historic house, and all things will become new to him."

"Do you really think so?" asked her ladyship, scarcely knowing what she was saying.

"If the whole teaching of my life is not a failure, if thirty years of close observation and thirty years of careful study of men and women be not the foolishness of fools, it will be so. When I read his speeches, I thought it possible, probable, but after seeing him, and hearing him to-night, I am sure. As I said, it has been my business for thirty years to know men. To you it has been no secret, Lady Neville, and thus I can speak plainly, although I have never been privileged to know you till yesterday. You know that I have had to deal with delicate questions, and have been led into the society of all classes of individuals. In order to serve the Church, I have been obliged to study men and motives closely. Well, I have had a special opportunity of understanding Rutland, for there is no place where a man's strength and weakness can be so clearly seen as on a public platform."

"And what is your estimate of Mr. Rutland?"

"The most casual observer can see that he is highly

sensitive and emotional, and yet not so emotional but that his critical faculties are much in evidence. At first I thought he was that kind of man who will do anything for popularity, and that this debate might be an expression of that trait in his character. But that is not so. He is deeply and sincerely conscientious. With him truth is before everything. He is spiritually-minded, too; and I am as certain as I can be of anything, that the barrenness of a Protestant sect does not, cannot satisfy him. He possesses the historical spirit, too. He knows something of, and longs more for the science of history. He has a logical mind, and yearns for the deepest and truest expressions of a spiritual idea. The Church is to him a great spiritual idea, and in his heart of hearts he longs for its visible manifestation. At present he may not feel the poverty of the bedraggled, torn, tattered, miserable caricature of the Church called Protestantism; but the feeling will come. All his bitterness towards us is a matter of education; but when he sees us, and realises our ideals; when he understands how truly the Catholic Church expresses his own deepest longings, he will come to us as a lamb comes to its mother."

Alizon Neville's eyes fairly glistened for joy as the priest spoke. His words lent wings to her imagination too, and she saw what the Jesuit intended she should see.

"Mother, mother!" she cried, "it would be glorious!"

"We must make him feel that the Catholics are kind and forgiving," went on the Jesuit; "he must know that although we are grieved at his attack, we are not angry, that we have no bitterness towards him, but that we pity all that are away from the light. We must not act the superior person, and make it appear that we regard his Protestantism with scorn; we are simply believers in the great Church which the Founder of Christianity established, and which has through the ages nurtured and comforted untold

millions of souls. We must not do this by protestations ; but simply, unostentatiously. He must see our faith, not by argument, but by simple deed. Presently he will begin to ask questions, he will take an interest in our ceremonials, our purposes, our ideals. Then, if he can be made to feel that this home of the Nevilles is also his home, where he is kindly, ay, lovingly welcomed, the spell of truth will be cast upon him, and he will be saved."

For a long time they talked, each referring to the Jesuit in everything, and he, naturally, taking the place of teacher and adviser. To Lady Neville the plan seemed good and holy, especially as it was advocated by a renowned priest of the Church. She felt it her duty to do her part, and she could see no objection to her falling in with all that was required of her. As for Alizon, she was fascinated by Father Ritzoom, and moved to admiration by his desire to win a heretic back to the truth. She did not dream of the results, she felt no premonition concerning the possible tragic outcome of what they were discussing. Neither did it enter her mind that she was regarded by the priest as the principal actor in the drama.

"Very well," said Lady Neville, as the priests left the Priory that night, "everything shall be arranged as you suggest."

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST LINK IN THE CHAIN

“**W**EEL, aw think things ev settled daan middlin’,
Mester Rutland.”

It was old Matthy Bray who spoke to Duncan on the steps of Tudor Chapel. They had just come from one of the meetings of the Church, and were on the point of going home. Several days had elapsed since the night when Duncan had given his lecture.

“After storm comes a calm,” laughed the young minister.

“Aw doan’t understand it,” remarked the weaver.

“No moor do aw,” said Jonas Dixon, who with two or three others had come out with them.

“Don’t understand what?” asked Rutland.

“Sheen and the Cathlicks bein’ so quiet; it’s noan like ’em. Aw reckon they’ve summat else up their sleeves.”

“What can they have?”

“Aw doan know; but ther’s not one of ’em bin writin’ to th’ papers, and nobody’s said a word. We all know as aa tha gived ’em a rare licken, but they’d a noan settled daan so quiet ef they ’adn’t bin tould to. Aw know ’em too weel for that.”

“Yi,” chimed in Jonas Dixon, “aw doan’t forgett thet Boggart Clough job. Why doan’t ee tell all th’ truth baat thet job, Mester Rutland?”

"Because—well, there are good reasons."

"Yi, aw spoase soa. But theer, aw'm noan afeard of a good row. A dogas barks rarely isn't as ugly as th' one what 'angs 'is 'ead and growls; and it seems to me as aa thet's what Sheen's lot are doin'. What dost thaa think, Matthy?"

"Aw think thou'rt reight, Jonas. Weel, we mun kip aar een oppen, that's all. But mind, Mester Rutland, foaks of all sooarts are watchin' thee. Tha'st put thysen on a 'igh plaace, and naa church foaks and Cathlicks, as weel as all th' chapel foaks, 'll watch all tha dost. We look on thee as a sooart ov defender of th' faith, and if tha maks ony slips, the very chaps as shaated praises baat tha, and said thaa wert 'champion,' 'll be the first to call thee naames."

"Yes, I expect so."

"Yi, Lancashire foaks are the best in th' world, aw reckon, but we ev aar failin's, we're noan but 'uman. We're bit like th' owd Jews. One day they shaated 'Hosanna,' and th' next 'Crucify Him.' But theer, thou'rt noan baan to mak a fool o' thysen, art a?"

"I hope not."

"Well, then, my advice is this, and aw've noan lived i' Lynford better nor fifty year for nowt. Thee be careful if ony o' th' Cathlicks maks friends wi' thee."

"Yes, I'll be careful," laughed Duncan, but he had no fears.

"And theer's another thing. Thou'st kept away fro' the lasses rarely since thou'st bin here. If aw wur thee, aw'd geet wed."

Duncan laughed heartily. "I've never seen a suitable wife yet," he said.

"Well, that's thy fault. Ther's plenty o' nice lasses as belongs to Tudor, that thaa could 'ave for the axin, and lasses wi' brass an' all. Ther's Ashton's lasses, naa. Th'

owd Ashton 'll gi' 'em ten thaasand apiece, aw'm tow'd, and Alice 'ud be a champion minister's wife. But theer, thet's noan aar business. 'Appen yo've got a lass somewhere."

"No, I've not."

"Well, aw wish tha wert wed. Foaks talk less abaat a passon when oo's wed."

Matthy Bray and Duncan had by this time left the rest, and were walking in the direction of the young minister's lodgings.

"Ya see, Mester Rutland," went on the old weaver, "we all 'oap as aa tha't stay at Tudor mony a year, and we think as if tha had a good wife fro' the Church, tha would have a stake in th' place, so ta spaik. And ther's nowt like 'avin' a stake in a place."

"You think not?"

"It's th' great cure for moast things. Aw reckon if aw were a rich man aw could kill moast o' th' socialism in a week."

"Indeed."

"Yi, aw could. Ef aw wer to give a cottage to every socialist, it 'ud stop his maath. Aw've seen it a lot o' times. It's chaps wot's got nowt who are socialist. When they've gotten a bit o' brass their socialism goes."

"I daresay; but what has that to do with my getting a wife?"

"Ay, if thou'st gotten a wife fro' Lynford, thaa would 'ave a stake 'ere. The roots o' thy bein' would be fastened 'ere. Besides, thy missis could go wi' thee to th' young fowks' meetin's, and thet 'ud stop gossip."

"Why, have people been gossiping about me?"

"Ther's nobody been talked abaat as much, but not i that way. Aw'm only thinking baat the future. Thee look aat for a nice lass, Mester. One with a bit o' brass, and

thee settle daan at Tudor for life. But mind, oo mun come fro' Tudor."

"Must she?"

"Yi, oo must. Tudor foak 'ud noan put up wi' a lass from th' other chapels."

"Good-night, Matthy. I'm afraid you are a dangerous adviser," laughed Duncan.

"Noa, aw'm on th' reight track. Aw've cut all my teeth, Mester, an' aw'm wot th' lawyers ca' *Kompus Mentle*. Aw reckon thet's it, but aw'm noan a Greek scholard, so 'appen tha'lt be laughin' at me."

"You are quite right," laughed Rutland; "good-night," and he entered the door of his lodgings.

A good fire was burning in the grate, otherwise the young man's study was in entire darkness. He did not trouble to light the gas, however; instead he drew an arm-chair before the fire and began musing. In spite of himself the weaver's words affected him. It was very lonely sitting night after night in his room. True, he could spend as many of his evenings out as he desired, but after he had been to the meetings he felt no desire for the company of people, with many of whom he had no tastes in common. Besides, all men, especially Englishmen, long for a home of their own. While he was at college he felt no loneliness. There was always a host of fellows ready to talk with him; but now—well, after six months of lodgings, he wished he had a home. As the old weaver had said, there were perhaps true, good-hearted girls at Tudor Chapel who would not object to become his wife. But he had paid but little attention to them. The truth was there was no one in the Church to whom he had given a second thought. Alice Ashton, the girl the old weaver had named, was the eldest daughter of a wealthy manufacturer. She was a tall, buxom young woman of five-and-twenty, healthy, good-tempered, and of

tolerable intelligence. She had been as well educated as was common among the wealthy people of the town, and would doubtless make a faithful, loving wife. She had been especially kind to him, too, and always seemed pleased to be in his company. But he did not care for her in the slightest degree. By nature he was romantic, and had dreamed dreams of the woman he would love, and of the sensations which would possess him. This girl did not make a pulse beat quicker; there was no more romance in meeting her than in meeting Jonas Dixon the weaver.

He was suffering a reaction, too, after the excitement of the debate. He missed the thundering plaudits of the people, and longed for those emotions which possessed him when he rose to answer Father Sheen. It was true his work at Tudor Church was wondrously successful, and he loved that work beyond words, and still he felt something wanting.

And so he went on dreaming, thinking, until it struck him that he might as well light the gas and read for half an hour before Mrs. Nutter brought in his supper of bread and milk, which was his invariable meal before going to bed. No sooner had he lit the gas, however, than he saw a letter lying on his study desk which had come in by the night's post. He noticed that a Lynford postmark was stamped upon it, and then opened it languidly.

"One of the Churches asking me to preach, I suppose," he thought, and then he caught sight of the writing. "It's from a lady; I wonder who it can be from?"

This was the letter which reached him that February night:—

"THE PRIORY, LYNFORD,

"Feb. 13, 189—.

"DEAR MR. RUTLAND,—I have for a long time been impressed by the fact that there is a good work which

ought to be done in the town, and in which all the Churches could take part. There are four cab-stands in Lynford, besides those at the stations, and the only places of shelter which the cabmen have, are the nearest public-houses. This, for many reasons, is undesirable, especially as it has a tendency to lead men to be intemperate who would otherwise be sober. I would, therefore, suggest that the representatives of all the principal Churches should meet to consider the advisability of building a sufficient number of convenient and comfortable cabmen's shelters. It is probable you may think the Priory a rather inconvenient place of meeting, nevertheless, I shall be very glad if you will come here on Friday night next (I understand that Friday is the night on which ministers are least engaged), so that we may, I trust, form some definite plan of action.

"With kind regards,

"I am, yours sincerely,

"MARY NEVILLE.

"*N.B.—Time of meeting, 8 o'clock.*"

Duncan read this letter through twice, and then laughed a little nervously.

"Of course Father Sheen will be there," he thought, "but I can scarcely refuse. Tudor is the oldest and largest Nonconformist Church in the town, and ought to be represented. The object is a good one too. I have often pitied those poor fellows standing around in the pouring rain. It will be awkward meeting Father Sheen and Lady Neville, but it is evident they bear no ill-will, and I see no reason why I should be awkward. Yes, I'll go."

He immediately scribbled a hasty acceptance of the invitation, and then went to the pillar-box which stood near his own door and posted the letter.

"I wonder whether Miss Alizon Neville will be at the meeting?" he thought as he came back to the house. "Scarcely, I should think. I have an idea that she will never speak to me again."

When Friday night came he found his way to the Priory; he was rather late owing to the fact that just as he was about to start some one had called asking him to visit a sick woman. It was therefore nearly half-past eight before he arrived at the house. He was immediately ushered into the room where a number of people sat, including Father Sheen.

Lady Neville's greeting as he entered was most cordial, and he could not help feeling that he was regarded as a person of importance in the meeting. On more than one occasion Father Sheen directly asked his opinion, and on his giving it, immediately advocated its acceptance. Indeed, the most friendly and genial person in the room was the old priest. He told several funny stories with considerable spirit, and caused roars of laughter by them. For there is no part of the country where people are so easily moved to laughter as in Lancashire. Let a dozen men and women, of whatever degree, get together, and the slightest witticism will produce laughter, while a funny story will cause infinite merriment. Lancashire people are what is generally termed "hard-headed," they are as keen at driving a bargain as the proverbial Yorkshireman, they will seldom err on the side of generosity when business is concerned; nevertheless, they are simple-minded, tender-hearted people, as easily moved to laughter and tears as little children, and it is difficult to bestow higher praise than that in a cynical and callous age.

Presently the business of the meeting came to an end. Rutland's suggestion that a subscription list be opened, that her ladyship be the treasurer, and the town-clerk the secre-

tary, was passed without a dissentient, and a working committee was elected on the spot.

Immediately this was done Father Sheen called Rutland aside and asked him a question on a matter which seemed to the young minister of but little importance, but which apparently exercised the old priest's mind greatly. Indeed, so interested did he become concerning the matter, and so earnestly did he talk, that Rutland for courtesy's sake was obliged to listen, and consequently a few minutes later he found that the rest of the members of the meeting had departed, and that he was alone in the room with the old Irishman.

At this juncture Lady Neville entered the room.

"I am so glad you are not gone, Mr. Rutland," she said graciously. "I was anxious that you should not slip out without my having a chance of speaking to you. Alizon was telling me the other day that you were very fond of old houses. I thought you might like to look over the Priory."

"I should be delighted," replied Rutland, almost without thinking.

"It is rather a fine old house in its way, I suppose," went on her ladyship, "and has many interesting associations. There are secret passages, secret cells, places where traitors have been hidden, and outlaws sheltered. There is a haunted room, where the ghost of Sir Thomas More is supposed to appear, and a royal chamber where Charles I. is said to have slept. I shall be delighted to show you through."

"You are very kind," said Duncan. "I am afraid you have fastened upon a weakness of mine. I am simply a child when I am brought into contact with things old, and mysterious. But I am afraid I am taxing your ladyship's kindness far too much by accepting."



"She held out her hand and greeted him."

"Oh, no; do not mention it. It will be a real pleasure to show you through the building. But what time is it, Father Sheen?"

"It is half-past nine," replied the priest.

"Oh, I remember now. We dined very early to-night in view of this meeting, Mr. Rutland, and all this talking is exhausting. I am sure, Father Sheen, you will be glad of some slight refreshment, and I hope Mr. Rutland will consent to join us at a little supper. He will need it to fortify himself against the ghosts;" and her ladyship laughed pleasantly.

Before he realised what he was doing he found himself in another room speaking to Alizon Neville.

The young minister felt his heart beat faster as she held out her hand, and greeted him with a kind smile. Everything was so different from what he had expected. Instead of being cold and haughty, she was kind and gracious. He could not help feeling how beautiful she was. There in the glow of the lamplight her finely moulded form revealed itself to advantage, while her somewhat heightened colour, and bright, shining eyes, were the accompaniments of a face which to the young man was lovely beyond words. The great masses of dark, wavy hair, which glistened in the light, seemed to the romantic young minister almost like a nimbus, and at that moment he forgot that he was a commoner, while she belonged to one of the oldest families in England, forgot that he was a Protestant and that she was an ardent Catholic.

In spite of the socialistic tendencies of the age, England is a conservative country, and there is much truth in the old saying that an Englishman loves a lord. He does, and always will, I suspect, while we are a nation and remember that we have a history. Not that Rutland was a worshipper of aristocracy. Far from it. He was too sensible a fellow

for that. And yet he was influenced by the fact that Alizon Neville came of a race which had influenced the life of the country. Although he did not know it, those old rooms, the quaint, antique furniture, and the fact that the Priory was associated with some of the important epochs of the English race, had a strange effect upon him.

They talked about books, pictures, plays, and men, and the time sped by on the wings of the wind. When they rose from the table Father Sheen looked at his watch.

"It is nearly half-past ten, Lady Neville," he said with mock seriousness.

"It is?" cried Rutland. "I had forgotten—that is, I had no idea it was so late. I am afraid I dare not tax you to take me over the Priory to-night."

"It is rather late," said Lady Neville. "It would take at least two hours. You must come some other day, Mr. Rutland—come early. Can't you decide upon an afternoon now? Almost any day next week I shall be delighted to see you."

Rutland was fascinated, bewildered. Scarcely realising what he was doing, he mentioned a day on which he would be at liberty.

"That will be delightful," said Lady Neville graciously. "You and Father Sheen will be able to go back to Lynford together; but there is plenty of time for you to smoke a cigar before leaving us."

She led the way into the library, and the two men smoked and talked, while Lady Neville and Alizon joined in their conversation. Rutland felt that this was the most delightful evening he had ever spent.

"Next Wednesday, then, at three o'clock, I shall expect you both," said her ladyship. "You will then be able to go over the house before dinner quite comfortably. Good-night."

The two men walked towards Lynford, while Lady Neville went back to Alizon.

"He is really a delightful young fellow to know," she remarked, as Alizon sat looking into the fire.

"Yes," replied the girl.

"I had no idea he would be so interesting. He is really worth knowing, apart from every other consideration."

"Do you think all this is quite right, mother?" asked the girl.

"I do, indeed. We are simply kind to him, and—that is all. If he is led to the truth, he will thank us throughout his life. Besides, it is our duty."

"Do you think he will ever become a convert?"

"Yes, I think so; don't you?"

"No," replied Alizon, "I do not believe he will ever be a Catholic."

"I believe you are quite mistaken," replied Lady Neville.

"You will see that I am right in a few weeks."

CHAPTER XIII

THE BEGINNING OF THE STRUGGLE

ALIZON NEVILLE looked forward with interest towards Duncan Rutland's visit to the Priory on the following Wednesday. The Christmas and New Year's festivities had long come to an end, and Lady Neville had postponed going to London for a few weeks, in order to fall in with Father Ritzoom's plans. For although her ladyship generally went to town for the season, she was by no means a society woman. Neither did Alizon care much for the ordinary round of London festivities. Hers was an intellectual, rather than a pleasure-loving nature, and while by no means a pedant, she was fond of conversing with cultured people. Her life was rather quiet at the Priory, and so she welcomed the thought of meeting with Rutland, and of hearing him talk.

She was much interested in the Jesuit's scheme for the young minister's conversion, but her faith in it was not strong. Had she known the whole of his plans she would doubtless have felt differently, in all probability she would have refused to participate in it. Like all true Catholics, however, she believed that such as he remained Protestant because of prejudice, and because of ignorance concerning the great truths of her faith. And yet, as she remembered

how he had torn Father Sheen's arguments to pieces she doubted whether being brought into close contact with Catholics at the Priory would effect the desired change. True, she had great faith in the influence of her mother, while Father Ritzoom almost awed her. His strong face and unfathomable eyes led her to believe that he had entered into the secrets of power, and was thus enabled to achieve what to others would be impossible.

As a consequence she anticipated Rutland's visit with more than ordinary interest. There was something fresh and unconventional in his conversation, and he was utterly different from what she regarded as the approved type of Nonconformist ministers. While they had sat in the library on the previous Friday night, he had betrayed the fact that he was a lover of fun, that he enjoyed quick and witty repartee, and that he could laugh with the merriest. She enjoyed his criticisms of books, too. Unlike Father Sheen, he seemed to have read everything, and was able to talk on subjects concerning which she thought he would be in entire ignorance. She had fancied, moreover, that when brought face to face with her mother and Father Sheen, after the debate, he would have been ill at ease, and have betrayed awkwardness, and perhaps with a want of tact, have referred to it in such a way as to make it hard to bear with his society. In this she was entirely mistaken. He had proved himself equal to the occasion, and had entirely ignored their former meetings. Besides, he was good-looking as well as interesting, and so on the morning of the day of Rutland's visit she felt exceedingly light-hearted, and when lunch was over, was more particular about the dress she wore than she had been for many days.

During the morning her mother had handed her a letter from Father Sheen, and when she had read it a look of satisfaction came into her eyes.

"You see we shall not have his help in entertaining Mr. Rutland," remarked Lady Neville.

"I see," she replied. "He has gone to Manchester to meet Father Ritzoom, he says. I thought the Jesuit was to stay in Lynford for some time."

"I thought so too; but it seems that he has been called to Manchester. I suppose he goes to Ireland to-morrow, and then he will come back here in about a fortnight. I have invited him to stay at the Priory. He is a wonderful man."

"I am almost afraid of him," said the girl.

"Are you? Doubtless he is very clever, and is of immense power in the Church. I suppose he has great influence in Rome."

"He seems to know every one, too," said the girl. "By the way, what shall we do to entertain Mr. Rutland when he comes?"

"Well, we must show him around the house, and then, perhaps, you can play at billiards with him until dinner."

"But supposing he can't play?"

"It doesn't matter. His interests are so varied that it will be easy to amuse him."

When Duncan reached the Priory he was received with a welcome smile, so gracious, indeed, was Lady Neville, that the young man remembered the advice of the old weaver, and wondered if it was of value. He dismissed it in a moment, however. He remembered that he was dealing with a woman who, whatever her religious prejudices might be, would scorn to do an unworthy act. With the assurance of a young man, he believed that Father Sheen and his friends had accepted with the best possible grace the fact that he, Rutland, had had the best of the debate, and to show that they bore him no ill-will, they had decided to be friendly with him. He could not help realising that it was not common for people occupying Lady Neville's social

position to seek the acquaintance of a Protestant minister. But with the carelessness of youth he discarded the fact as of no value. He reflected that although he was not the equal of her ladyship in wealth and social position, he was not altogether her inferior in education, and was regarded as more than the equal of her spiritual adviser in mental attainments. Consequently, he was at ease in her society. He saw that she treated him as an equal, and so he gave himself over to the pleasant sensations caused by his visit.

He did not seem at all chagrined at Father Sheen's non-appearance ; indeed, the afternoon passed like a pleasant dream. Both Alizon and Lady Neville accompanied him in his tour through the house, and the young man was charmed. Old rooms, old pictures, old curiosities, delighted him beyond measure ; he listened with intense interest to the descriptions given of events of bygone days, and spite of his beliefs, could not help sympathising with the men who, in the reign of Elizabeth had been secreted in the Priory by the old Nevilles, had been true to their faith, rather than to the laws of their country. And yet no word was uttered about religion. Even when they visited the private chapel, and both Alizon and Lady Neville genuflected before the altar, no word was uttered ; they performed their act of homage reverently but naturally, neither did they pay any seeming attention to the attitude of the young Protestant.

"Oh, it is glorious, glorious !" cried the young man, as they went from room to room, "simply glorious !"

"You like the house ?" said Lady Neville with a smile.

"It is just a dream," remarked the young man enthusiastically. "All the houses I have visited have, almost without exception, been modern ; they have had no history, no romance, no mystery. Here one is led to forget the

prosny present. We live in an age before railways, before the advent of machinery. It is Arcadia."

"You like old things?" asked Lady Neville.

"I like everything that contains the elements of mystery," said the young man. "When I was a boy, my favourite author was Hans Andersen. Even now I am fascinated by every form of superstition. Wizardry, witchcraft, faith-healing—I simply revel in hearing about them."

"But you do not believe in them?"

"It depends upon my mood. If the critical faculty be uppermost, I, of course, laugh at them all. But sometimes I forget to analyse, forget to reflect, and then I believe in them as sincerely as a child of four years old believes in Santa Claus. I envy you beyond words, Lady Neville. To live at this Priory, where everything has a history, and is associated with romance, must be a continual source of delight."

"But one gets used to it," said Alizon.

"Naturally," replied Duncan; "but it has its influence all the same."

"Oh, I care very little for the house itself," replied the girl, "but I do love the park, the woods. I simply long for summer, when I can lose myself among the trees. You say you forget yourself when you wander along dark passages, and visit gloomy dungeons; but I forget myself when I am out in the woods in the summer time. When I hear the beck rippling, and the birds singing, I cease thinking, I simply give myself over to delightful impressions."

Duncan looked into her face as she spoke, and he knew that she felt what she said. And while he looked, he fancied her wandering among the woods, where rays of sunlight filtered their way through the leafy trees.

Life was very sweet to him just then. For the time he

had forgotten that he was a minister of a Nonconformist Church, forgotten that he had to do with men and women who did not dream, but whose lives were moulded and permeated by the money-making town in which they lived. He felt no disparity between himself and the girl who stood by his side. True, she might speak of her ancestors who lived in this very house before the dawn of that religious revolution which shook the very foundations of European life, while he counted nothing concerning his own ancestry; but they were akin in spirit. At that time, too, he forgot that she believed in what, to him, were so many fables, while he was an avowed enemy to the faith for which she was ready to die. He was young, and ardent, and romantic, and so he could forget the grim realities which would face him on the morrow; to-day he was under a spell, and without a struggle he yielded to it.

"Yes, country life is very beautiful in the summer," he said, "but I am content now with a dark, murky sky, and stones of granite. You see," he went on presently, "a house is suggestive of home, and home is very dear to us English people. I have no home."

"No home?" said the girl.

"No," replied the young man. "My father and mother are dead. They left me just enough to see me through college, and a pittance for bread and cheese besides; but I am homeless. Neither have I brother or sister. I was the only child, and so—well, I am practically destitute of relations."

"And how did you occupy yourself during your vacations?" asked Lady Neville.

"Oh, I lived at the college."

"It must have been very lonely for you?"

"I don't know. I read very hard mostly, and when one has books, one forgets. Besides, I wanted to take my

M.A. at the London University, and the examinations there are no make-believe."

"But did you not feel the need of friends at Christmas time?"

"Yes, and no. You see my college mates often asked me to spend my vacations with them, but I wanted to get my work done."

"But would you not take your degree in your ordinary college course?"

"Oh no. It is true we had a course of classics there, but our main business was to study theology, and those subjects which appertained thereto. My studies for the London University were practically extra. No, I did not feel my loneliness as much there as I have felt it here."

"How is that? I know many nice people who belong to Tudor Chapel, and I suppose all of them are glad to see you."

"Oh yes, they are very kind. In many ways, I think the Lancashire people are the kindest people I have ever met; but they are so eminently practical. They do not seem to care for beauty in the way I care for it, and they love to talk about things which have no interest for me. Of course, it is my fault, but the fact is none the less there. That is why my visit here to-day has given me so much pleasure."

"I am glad you have enjoyed being here," said Lady Neville graciously; "we shall be pleased to see you often. We see little society, and you will be always welcome."

He looked at Alizon, who seconded her mother's words, and the young man thanked them both, and promised to avail himself of their kindness.

The day passed away quickly, far too quickly for the young man, and when he left the Priory that night, his

heart warmed at the remembrance of Alizon Neville's words asking him to come again soon.

This visit was the forerunner of others. They did not happen very often, because a large and growing Church takes up a great deal of his time. Still he found his way to the Priory as often as he could, and each visit deepened the impression which the first had made. The atmosphere of this old home was so different from that of the other houses which he visited. Everything was so quiet, so orderly, so pure. He could not help comparing the conversation of Lady Neville and Alizon with that of his Church officers. These men were kind and cordial, but in some of them was a taint of coarseness. They laughed at jokes which he did not like, and they did not care for some of the things which he loved. Besides, a minister's life is not a bed of roses. None but those who have had the care of a Church, can know of the thousand things which happen to wound a sensitive nature.

The excitement of the debate was over, and things had settled down to their normal state. The people were proud that their minister had borne himself so valiantly, but they held that he had only done his duty, and so no more need be said about the matter. Some few men who longed for publicity wrote letters to the *Lynford Observer*, but they were read by only very few, and with languid interest. The congregations at Tudor continued to be very large, and the increased activities of the Church caused the minister a greatly added amount of work.

People with but few interests naturally live in a very narrow world, and as a consequence grow jealous, and often fault-finding. They magnify their own importance, and feel hurt if others do not realise it. Duncan found this to his cost.

Such conversations as the following were often taking

place, and each one of them wounded the young man sorely.

"Hollo, Mester Duncan."

"Oh, Mrs. Bray, how are you to-day?"

"Only middlin'. Aw noaticed as aa tha wert baan to gi' me the goa-by, so aw jist spok. Aw've bin very poorly. Yo' 'eerd on, aw spoase?"

"No, I hadn't heard."

"Yi, but I 'ave. Why, I've noan been i'side Tudor for three week. Ain't yo' noaticed?"

"No, I hadn't noticed."

"Yi, aw thowt as much. That's all th' noatice yo' tak ov foak been away fro' chapel."

"Well, you see it's difficult to notice in a large congregation who's present and who isn't."

"Yi, aw spoase so. Aw'm one o' th' poor people, and so no noatice is took ov me. I 'eerd as 'aa yo' were in aar street; yo' called to see Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Longley, but yo' noan comed to see me. Yi, but yo're noan like owd Mester Simpson when oo wur minister at Tudor, oo never neglected me. Good mornin', Mester Duncan."

This may seem but a matter of little importance, but such conversations made Duncan miserable for days. He did all the visiting he was able; but the Church and congregation were large, and lived all over the town, and thus a great deal of time was taken up in visiting a few people. It took him a long time, moreover, to know the members of his flock, and the history of the various families became confused in his mind.

If he called at a house, however, and confessed his ignorance concerning any member of the family, it was often taken as an offence. In short, he soon discovered that try as hard as he might, there was a number of people who

grumbled at him, and spoke as if he neglected his work. This fact came to him in various ways, and he was quick to interpret the hints which fell.

In fact, the minister does not exist who pleases everybody, and as men grow older they cease to expect it, but Duncan was young and sensitive, and so every approach to fault-finding hurt him more than some direct attack would hurt many others.

True he found joy in his work—a joy unspeakable. He loved preaching, loved to prepare for his pulpit work, and his heart rejoiced beyond measure as he saw that young men and women were being influenced by his work. On the other hand, he found no pleasure in many of the meetings he was called upon to attend. Committee meetings, mothers' meetings, sewing meetings, and a host of others, were, to him, weariness of the flesh. And yet he was expected to attend them, and if he didn't, the fact was hinted to him in some form or another. One society grumbled that he took no interest in its welfare, and another complained that its meetings never made any headway since the last minister left them.

He discovered, too, that although the Church was supposed to be free, it was bound by rules formulated a century ago, and often when he advanced something which he thought good for the working of the Church, he would be immediately met with a question as to what Rule 45 said about the matter.

Of course the great mass of the people was with him, and realised that never since the Church was formed had it been such a power for good, but many grumbled at innovations, and some would rather that work should be at a standstill, than done in any other way than their own. And so it came about that one jealous man stung him on the one side, some conceited lad pricked him on the other, and

because he was of a highly-wrought nature, he felt pained beyond measure.

At some of the meetings he attended, men, who knew no more of theology than of Sanscrit, aired their opinions with great confidence; while lads who hardly knew the A.B.C. of thinking, told him what he ought to do. He remembered the position held by the vicar of the parish in which Tudor was situated, and sighed. Sometimes when he was in a despondent mood, he wondered whether such methods of Church government were not contrary to the best interests of religion, and asked himself whether a minister could exercise a truly legitimate influence, while he was regarded by the Church as simply a layman, with no more authority than themselves.

He reflected that he had spent six years of his life in studying the vital questions of Church and religious life, and yet some weaver, or clogger, with the assurance of ignorance, treated his words as of the same value as his own.

Thus it came about that his visits to the Priory became trebly a pleasure to him. Here he met with people who understood him, people who were cultured, who had read the books he loved, and who enjoyed the thoughts, that to him, made life worth the living.

Several weeks had passed since the debate, and spring was fast approaching, the wide stretches of moors became less and less dreary, while, in spite of the smoke, the grass became greener, and the green leaves began to appear. Duncan had seen Father Sheen twice since the meeting to consider cab shelters, and on each occasion the old priest had been very cordial. He had been to the Priory four times, and on each occasion the influence of its inmates became greater.

Indeed, it became his delight to go to the old house, and thus when, one day, a letter from Lady Neville reached

him, asking him to meet Father Ritzoom, a renowned scholar, who had brought with him some curious ancient manuscripts, he accepted the invitation with eagerness, and looked forward to conversation with a man who was a scholar and a thinker.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW DUNCAN RUTLAND'S EYES WERE OPENED

DUNCAN RUTLAND was much impressed by the learning, as well as by the geniality of Father Ritzoom. The manuscripts mentioned by Lady Neville proved to be some old parchments which had been recently discovered in one of the ancient monasteries in Palestine. They were said to be third century copies of parts of St. Paul's letters, and were of great value in proving both the genuineness and authenticity of the New Testament. Duncan, who was a very fair scholar, entered eagerly into a debate with Father Ritzoom concerning their authorship, and presently the priest gave a very interesting account of the incidents which led to their discovery.

It appeared that an old man living in the monastery gave up his whole time to the deciphering and translating the various versions of the New Testament; dealing with the Epistles which Protestants declared to be uncanonical, as well as those which they had accepted. While busily searching among the vast collection of papers which were contained in the convent library, he discovered a crypt, and on further investigation, unearthed the precious writings on parchment which they were that night examining.

"Those old monasteries must be splendid storehouses of rare lore," remarked Duncan presently.

"Yes," replied Ritzoom, "and the Church has ever been careful to treasure such riches. Throughout all the ages, even those when the clouds have been hanging heavily, she has always set apart her scholars to investigate, and thus to know the value of her great inheritance."

"Yes," replied Duncan, "and your position as the oldest Church has enabled you to have the greatest possible advantage in this direction."

"Naturally; no other section of the community *can* have access to our treasures," replied the priest, "that is, without our consent. The Greek Church has never been in a position to obtain these valuable relics of the past, while as for the Protestants—well, they are but of yesterday."

"That is true," remarked Duncan thoughtfully.

"Of course," went on the priest, "we have had to be careful of such MSS., it would have been a sin to have cast our pearls before swine. They have had to be guarded by the wise men in all ages. Had they been given to the ignorant, the thoughtless, the greatest riches of the Church would either have been destroyed, or turned to wrong uses. It would have been like giving ignorant quacks liberty to dabble with the mysteries of medicine."

"You do not believe in the old adage, *Vox populi, vox Dei*?" said Rutland.

"I believe it to be a device of the devil," replied the priest. "Why, just fancy the danger accruing from such a system. Think of placing power in the hands of the vulgar crowd. Supposing you gave over the government of your country to the mob; think of the anarchy which would result."

"And yet in a sense it is in the hands of the mob," remarked Rutland.

"In a sense! But what sense? The so-called enfran-

chisement of the people is only a plaything to appease the cravings of ignorant children. As a matter of fact, the government of England is in the hands of the few. The Prime Minister of the country, or the few who may be in league with him, formulate the measures which shall be brought before the House of Commons, which is itself only a debating society. In the end the members vote for the thing their leaders advocate."

"That is true in part, but only in part."

"A very great part. Why, how much do you or I know of what goes on in the Cabinet? I read *The Times* religiously every day; but I am in entire ignorance of what goes on in the councils of those who rule the land. Some time ago there were great naval preparations at Plymouth and elsewhere, there was much talk about the mobilisation of the British forces. I asked various members of Parliament belonging to the Government what was the meaning of it, and they were as ignorant as I was. Shortly after the Prime Minister spoke at a representative gathering, but he coolly told his hearers that he did not feel disposed to tell what it meant. Then we talk about the enlightenment of the British public."

"True again," said Rutland; "but, then, if a Government does not please the people, that Government is turned out at the next election."

"Yes, and another takes its place, which acts in entirely the same way. Of course, it sometimes appears as though the people rule; but they do not. It is the few who rule, and not the many. The newspapers raise a great hue and cry, and the people howl, but what effect has it?" and the priest laughed quietly.

"Mark you, I do not object to this," went on Ritzoom; "rather, I believe in it. A mob should never govern, a mob should have all its thinking done for it. This is true

in all realms of life—it is the few who should control, and who, as a matter of fact, do control.”

“Yes,” replied Duncan, “but it is also true that these cliques have sown the seeds of revolution; they have legislated for their own class, they have kept all the power to themselves, with the result that the poor people have been oppressed and downtrodden, and the natural outcome of oppression is vice and ignorance.”

“There you mistake me,” replied the priest. “I believe that the heads of any community should regard themselves as the protectors of the common people. They should treat them as a father treats his children. He should do the very best for their comfort and their happiness, but directly he gives them the government of a household, anarchy, misery follow. This is true in relation to the placing of such valuable documents as these in the hands of the ignorant,” and he pointed to the MSS. they had been discussing. “It can be dealt with only by students, by scholars, by those who know the value of such things. It is only scholars who can translate, it is only scholars who can teach the crowd the truths that they contain.”

Duncan saw the drift of what the priest was saying; it was really an attack on the position he had taken when he gave his lecture on the Right of Private Judgment. He saw, moreover, that the Jesuit's words were full of fallacy, but at that moment the way to answer him did not appear. For one thing, he was influenced by the strong personality of the priest, he exercised a kind of charm which made his words seem weightier than they really were, and for another, he realised that he was the guest of Lady Neville, and that both she and Alizon were listening carefully to every word that was said.

“For my own part, I do not altogether agree with you,” said Lady Neville presently. “In some respects I am a

socialist, that is, I believe that a fair chance should be given to all. If there is a man in the mob who has intelligence, and who longs for culture, then by all means give him that culture."

"Your ladyship can have no more ardent supporter than I," remarked Ritzoom blandly. "In that sense our Church is the greatest socialistic force in the world. Is it not a fact that through all the ages, our priesthood, our scholars have come largely from the common people? In every town, in every village we have recognised genius, ay, anything of more than ordinary ability, wherever we have seen it; and that genius, however poor, has been given his chance. As you know, your ladyship, there have been Popes since St. Peter, whose calling before entering the priesthood, have been no higher than his upon whom the Church was built. But that is scarcely my contention. What I maintain is that the government of all communities should be given to the wise, and that the ignorant should not deal with those things for which they are utterly unfitted."

Rutland remembered the words of Goethe, who, when speaking of the Reformation, said that it had thrown back the civilisation of the world by centuries, because it had allowed the passions of the mob to decide on questions which could only be properly settled by wise men and scholars.

Under ordinary circumstances he would have been little moved by these things, but the influence of the old Catholic home to which he had been invited, the presence of two women who yielded their obedience to the Catholic system, and whose lives were pure and beautiful beyond reproach, seemed to make the priest's words appear in a new light. Besides, Ritzoom fascinated him. He felt that here was a man stronger than he, who had read

more, thought more deeply, and whose knowledge of the world was infinitely greater than his own.

Moreover, as far as he could see just then, the conversation had arisen naturally out of the study of the manuscripts, and for the first time he realised how unwise it would have been to have placed precious documents in the hands of those who could not realise their value, or to allow ignorant men to interpret them. Well, and had not the Protestant Church done this, and were not the sects a rope of sand because every ignorant man had been allowed to use the Bible to support his own fads? After all, there was something in the Catholic position. In the presence of Ritzoom, it seemed to him as though it might be a dangerous thing to place the Holy Scriptures in the hands of the ignorant. He had often been ashamed of the numerous sects which existed, and which, while not now at war with each other, seemed to exist for no other purpose than the support of their own little Bethels.

But these were only passing thoughts. After all, his Protestant convictions were too real to be really shaken by this desultory conversation, and when soon after the conversation turned into other channels, the influence of the priest passed away.

Alizon had scarcely spoken throughout the whole evening; she had paid great attention to what had passed, but had taken no part in anything. Several times when Rutland had turned his eyes in her direction, he had noticed that she had been watching the priest closely, and sometimes her lips parted as though she would ask questions, but she had evidently decided to be silent, much to the young minister's disappointment.

"I propose we have some singing," said Ritzoom presently. "Come, Miss Alizon, I am sure you will not refuse us."

Without a word the girl went to the piano and commenced singing. Duncan had never heard her before; indeed, he did not know that she possessed any gifts in this direction—he was therefore surprised at the brilliance of her performance. She had a rich contralto voice, and sung with great sweetness and power. She chose some of the old Catholic Passion music, and rendered some of the solos in such a way that Rutland's heart was stirred to the depths. As he sat listening he forgot all that the priest had said, and for the time became almost oblivious to his surroundings. It seemed as if he were in some old Cathedral, and that the whole atmosphere of the place was pure and uplifting. He felt as the old patriarch must have felt when he heard the words, "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

Outside the wind made music among the trees, but no other sound disturbed the silence of the night, while within the old Priory walls the girl poured out her soul in the music of those who had entered that sanctuary which may not be defamed by the unworthy.

Rutland listened like one entranced. Throughout the day his feelings had been wounded by people who were kind, but who did not understand his sensitive nature; but to-night everything tended to soothe, to heal. Father Ritzoom had appealed to the intellectual side of his life, while now this beautiful girl ministered to his deeper feelings. The words she sung seemed to be a prayer for him, and somehow life became sweeter, holier, as he listened. What if her faith differed from his? What though she regarded him as a heretic? They were both as one in the great prayer she breathed forth in song. Why should he repudiate those who professed the Catholic faith? Did we not owe to them some of the divinest

music the world had ever heard? The Church which had nurtured those souls who had entered so deeply into the spirit of harmony, could not be base. Besides, he had always admitted that Catholicism had given to the world the purest of saints? And so he became swayed by the music as tree-tops are swayed by the passing breeze.

About nine o'clock in the evening another visitor was announced. This proved to be a young man who lived about five miles away, and who was the only son of a Catholic squire. He was warmly welcomed by both Lady Neville and Alizon, while Father Sheen seemed to regard him as an old friend. When he was introduced to Father Ritzoom, the stranger professed great delight at seeing him, but he was cold and distant to Rutland.

It seemed that he had come to the Priory on horseback, in order to bring a message from his father, and Duncan was not long before he noticed the *esprit de corps* which evidently existed among the old Catholic families. The affectionate respect with which he treated Father Sheen also struck him. It was so different from the way in which the members of his own Church regarded him. He knew that he was the target for every critical shaft which the discontented members of his congregation might see fit to send forth, while this priest commanded the respect of all.

Before long Duncan had the impression that Lady Neville was anxious for him to go. He saw that young Arthur Stanley had some news which he wished to communicate, and so soon after the young squire's arrival he rose to go.

"And I will walk back with you," said Father Sheen. "Ritzoom, I hope you will not be troubled by the Priory ghost."

"Nothing troubles me," replied the Jesuit. "I've seen too many strange things to be troubled by what Lancashire

folks call 'a boggart'; but I'll call and see you to-morrow, so that you may be fully informed."

A few minutes later Duncan and the old priest were walking towards Lynford.

"It's been a delightful evening," said the young man.

"Yes," replied the other; "her ladyship is a model hostess, and Ritzoom is one of the most entertaining fellows I know. You don't know Mr. Arthur Stanley, I think?"

"No; I never met him until to-night."

"He belongs to a very old family, almost as old as the Nevilles. He will be wealthy some day, too. I suppose he is an aspirant for Miss Alizon's hand."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I should not be surprised if he has not come on that errand. I think it would be a delightful arrangement. The estates of the two families join, and he is really a most estimable fellow. I thought she greeted him very kindly to-night, didn't you?"

"I really did not pay much attention."

"Oh, but she did. He has been in love with her for years. I must say it would give me joy to celebrate the marriage sacrament. She is a beautiful girl, and as good as she is beautiful. Arthur Stanley will be a lucky fellow if he gets her. Don't you think so?"

"She is very charming," replied Duncan, and the priest noticed that his voice sounded strangely husky.

"Is Father Ritzoom staying at the Priory long?" asked Rutland presently.

"About a month, I think. It is possible he will arrange for a Retreat there."

"A Retreat?"

"Yes. I suppose you scarcely know the meaning of the term."

"No ; but I think I can guess what you mean."

"Very likely. It is simply a means for devout Catholics to deepen their spiritual life. Put in plain words, a number of people will for a few days leave the excitements of the world for the purpose of prayer. Father Ritzoom will be the officiating priest. I suppose you would not care to attend ?"

"I—I don't know. I think not."

"Oh, these retreats are blessed occasions of grace. They make the spiritual world a greater reality. We all need them. But here I am at home. Good-night."

The young man hurried on like one demented. When he reached his lodgings he threw himself in the armchair before the fire. Every member of the household was in bed, and so perfect stillness reigned.

The fire burnt lower and lower, and the air grew cold ; but he sat still. Midnight struck, but he never moved a muscle. His face was as pale as that of a corpse, his features were as still as those of a statue.

Presently he heard a step in the street outside. It was simply a policeman on his beat, but the sound disturbed him. He sat up and stared around the room like one dazed.

"My God, my God !" he cried hoarsely. "I cannot bear it ; no, I cannot bear it !"

The first part of the Jesuit's prophecy had been fulfilled. Duncan Rutland realised that he loved Alizon Neville with all the strength of his nature.

CHAPTER XV

"MAN PROPOSES, BUT GOD DISPOSES"

"WELL, what do you think of Rutland?" asked Father Sheen of Father Ritzoom, as the two men sat together in the study of the former the day following the visit to the Priory.

"I think that which confirms my first impressions concerning him," replied the Jesuit. "I think it is a great pity that such as he should be a heretic, and I am sure we shall be rendering our Church a great service by leading him to accept the faith."

"You think you will succeed, then?"

"I think the sun will rise to-morrow morning," replied Ritzoom, "and I think that two and two make four."

"I am not so sure," replied Father Sheen, shaking his head. "That is," he added, seeing the Jesuit laugh, "I am not so sure that Rutland will be converted."

"Did I not know that you were of pure Celtic origin I should believe you had some taint of Anglo-Saxon blood in you," remarked Ritzoom. "An Englishman is generally certain when he should be doubtful, and doubtful when he should be certain. He can swear to a material demonstration, but never to a moral certainty. He can understand that a piece of steel can be attracted by a magnet, because he can appreciate physical forces; but he cannot be just as

certain that a man of a certain disposition will yield to certain influences. To me, one is no less certain than the other."

"But human nature is a very complex business."

"So is a piece of machinery to a man who doesn't understand it. Everything is resolvable into some primary motive or principle; once understand that and all becomes plain. Besides, I believe in Providence."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, simply that Providence sent that Arthur Stanley to the Priory last night. Providence caused Alizon to greet him heartily. It brings matters to a speedy climax."

"In what way?"

"Did you not see Rutland's face last night?"

"I saw nothing particular."

"Sheen, you *must* be an Englishman. You could not be so dense otherwise. The fellow is already in love with her. He may not realise it yet; but he will in a day or two."

"How—how do you know?"

"How do I know that a man will laugh when you tickle him? By the way, did he say anything to you about Stanley? Did he ask you any questions?"

"I really have forgotten; but I know I told him that he was an aspirant for Alizon's hand."

"Ah, did you? Well?"

"I thought he took it quietly; stay, though, his voice was rather husky. But he changed the subject immediately after I had told him."

"Just so. He asked questions about me, didn't he?"

"My word, Ritzoom! But to tell the truth, he did. How did you know?"

The Jesuit laughed quietly.

"I don't think he slept much last night," he said presently.

"You believe then that——"

"I believe you are the most simple-minded fellow in the world, Sheen. You are too good to live."

"And you are the cleverest fellow I know. I wish you had met him in debate instead of my poor ignorant self. You would have pulverised him. Last night he said ditto to nearly everything you said."

"Yes, and saw the fallacy of it all. Had I uttered those sentiments in a public meeting he would have torn them to pieces. No, no. Things are better as they stand."

"Well, but what is the next move in the game you are playing for this man's soul?"

"I shall make no move."

"And he?"

"Well, I am not sure; but I don't think he will make any move."

"Then what are we to do?"

"Wait."

"But—but——"

"We sha'n't have to wait long. As I told you, I believe in Providence. In the meanwhile I can do a great deal of work at the Priory, and there is that Retreat."

"Oh yes. I mentioned something about it to Rutland."

Ritzoom looked at Father Sheen steadily.

"I told him that you were to conduct it, and asked him if he would care to come."

"Upon my word, Sheen, you are getting on. Well?"

"He said he did not think he would come."

Ritzoom looked steadily into the fire as though he were thinking.

"I am not sure, I am not sure," he said presently, like one thinking aloud.

"Not sure of what?"

"Oh, nothing! Have you read that life of Manning?"

"No ; have you ? "

"Yes. It is a dangerous book, a very dangerous book. It should be placed on the INDEX. I daresay it will be."

"But that will not prohibit Protestants from reading it. We are practically powerless in that direction."

"True. But never mind, Rutland will not read it. He will not read anything for some time to come. Poor fellow, I almost pity him."

"Do you think Alizon cares anything about Stanley, Ritzoom ? "

"Difficult to say. I should judge not. But you ought to know."

"Well, I don't ; but another question : Do you think she cares anything about Rutland ? "

"In a way, yes. But her feeling is by no means dangerous."

"She knows nothing of your plans ? "

"As far as she is concerned, certainly not."

"Nor her ladyship ? "

"No. I saw as soon as I had met her that it was out of the question. Still it does not matter. Both are anxious for his conversion ; and both are willing to render what service they can to bring around such a desirable state of things. Oh, I'm perfectly satisfied ! "

Meanwhile Duncan Rutland sat alone in his lodgings. As Father Ritzoom had said, he had not slept during the night, and now, as he crouched before the fire, his head resting on his hands, he looked worn out and ill. His face was very pale, while around his eyes dark rings had gathered. The revelation of his love had come upon him suddenly, and it had almost stunned him. He had been playing with dangerous weapons, and had not known it. Never dreaming of the plot of which he was the victim, he had gladly gone to the Priory, and at each visit he had yielded more

and more to the spell of a young girl's eyes. He did not know of the subtle influence which was working in his nature. He had thought of Alizon Neville as a beautiful, cultured girl, one who welcomed him kindly and made his every visit pleasant. In spite of the fact that she regarded him as an enemy to truth, or perhaps it was because she so regarded him, he was much interested in her; but the thought of loving her had never entered his mind. Her social position, her wealth, her antagonism to his faith, made it out of the question. He had felt no pang of jealousy when Arthur Stanley came into the room—it was too absurd; nor, perhaps, would his secret have been revealed to him had not Father Sheen told him of Stanley's hopes.

Then the truth came to him, and stunned him. He knew he loved her, knew that his life would be barren and utterly dreary without her. She had kindled a fire in his heart which could never be extinguished, the whole wealth of his life had gone out to her, and without her the future seemed but a dreary mockery.

"Everything is against it," he cried, as at length he started from his chair and began to pace the room. "Everything, everything! I belong to a class which does not mate with that to which she belongs. She is an aristocrat, I am a commoner; she is rich, I am poor—and yet I love her! Even although it were possible for her to love me, she could never be the wife of a Nonconformist minister. She is the only daughter of Lady Neville, an ardent Catholic. No, no, I must fight it—kill it!"

He seized his hat and went out. He could not breathe in his little study, the air was hot and stifling. A few minutes later he was out on the moors, where the wind swept freely, and the air smelt sweet and pure. He walked for hours, but he did not grow tired, nor did his eyes cease to burn with an unnatural light.

Again and again did he declare that he would cast his love from him as a painful mockery, and as often did he find himself hugging it to his breast as the joy of life. It was the old, old story. A man fighting against the dictates of his heart, and being defeated. The very habits of his life made his love more hopeless. He had not been accustomed to the society of women; he had had no love affairs. Had he, his present passion would not have been so strong, so overwhelming. From nineteen to twenty-six he had lived in his class-rooms and among his books. He had come to Lynford ignorant of the master-passion of life, and no member of his congregation had stirred his heart. Now—the flood-gates of his heart had been opened wide, and he was helpless.

He felt thankful for those wild, wide moors, and when he had got miles away from the town, so far that no signs of life were visible, he stood and looked around him. The sight was almost awe-inspiring; everywhere as far as the eye could reach the bare moorland stretched around him, rising and falling like great billows. Sometimes it seemed to him like a mighty sea, while he was alone, "all, all alone." Above, the grey sky spread itself, dull, gloomy, oppressive. Scarcely a streak of blue was to be seen. No sound was to be heard save the wailing of the wind, and an occasional cry of the moor birds.

"Of course she never dreams of such a thing," he cried presently—"it is absurd to think of it; it is worse than absurd, it is madness. Oh, I must kill it, I must kill it!"

He remembered the work he had to do, the great congregations to which he had to minister, the meetings he had to attend. He felt thankful that his sermons for the next Sunday were already written, otherwise he would have to stand dumb before the people. He knew that his preaching would be a failure on the following Sunday; he felt afraid.

Close by him was an old turf hedge. It had been built in some far back age, but for what purpose no one knew. There were no other evidences that the moors had ever been inhabited. Still, at some period there must have been men who lived there, and who had their hopes, their fears, their passions, just as he had. Who were they? What did they believe?

He knelt down on the soft, springy turf and cried aloud. "Oh God, hear me!" he cried. "Oh God, help me!" But the wailing wind and the shriek of the moor birds were the only answers that he heard to his prayer.

And yet his wild cry helped him. It made him realise the fact that he was not alone. The Spirit of God was on those wild moors, and that Spirit cared for him.

Hour after hour he stayed out there alone. By and by the rain fell, and the winds blew louder, but he did not heed. He partook of no food, but he felt neither faint nor hungry. He tried to formulate his plans, tried to think of means whereby his mad passion could be destroyed.

He remembered the words of old Matthy Bray. Yes, he would find a wife! That would be it. He would drive the thought of Alizon Neville from his mind. This was his manifest duty. When he married he must have a wife who would help him in his Church, and who would be received by the members of his congregation. Yes, the eldest Miss Ashton would make a suitable minister's wife. She was nearly his own age, she had received a conventional education, she was pious, and had been connected with Tudor Chapel all her life. She was wealthy too. She would receive £10,000 for her wedding dowry, and her position in the town was assured. Every one would declare that his choice was wise. He did not think she would reject him; apparently she delighted in his company, and would not refuse to be mistress of his home. At least, he hoped not

As for the thought of marrying Alizon Neville, it was utter madness. Fancy her marrying a Protestant minister!—it would outrage the religious life of the town. Yes, that must be his plan. He would drive her from his mind, and in order to do that he would call at Mr. Ashton's that very night.

He reached his lodgings about eight o'clock in the evening, and then, realising that his clothes were wet, he changed them, and afterwards went to Mr. Ashton's house. As he expected, he was met with a hearty welcome. The Lancashire people are among the most hospitable in the world; besides, Duncan was their minister, and was beloved by every member of the family.

He did his best to enter into the pleasures of the evening. He laughed loudly, he told stories, he sought the company of the eldest Miss Ashton, and made himself generally agreeable. The eldest Miss Ashton was evidently pleased at Duncan's behaviour; she sung the two songs she knew best, and reached a very high note at the conclusion of "Killarney"—a note which had never failed to draw a cheer at the concerts held at Tudor schoolroom.

Miss Ashton was renowned for this song. It was regarded as *her* song, and she had sung it scores of times with about as much feeling as an organ-grinder puts into the music which he grinds to order.

Duncan cheered the song greatly. He had heard her sing it several times before, just as the previous minister had heard it, but his applause was none the less hearty. Then she sung her other song, "*Ora Pro Nobis*," which she rendered in just the same way as she had rendered the other. He had heard it on every barrel organ in the town, it had been sung at almost every concert he had attended. Under other circumstances he would have felt like laughing. Miss Ashton was stout and florid. Her face was placid, there was

no passion in her nature. She ate well, she slept well, and was as little able to sing such a song as she was able to sing that sublime music which Alizon Neville had rendered with so much feeling the night before. The picture of the young girl came back to him, and he could not help comparing her with this buxom young woman who went on woodenly repeating both music and words.

No, he could not carry out his plans. It would be sacrilege to try and pretend to love her. How could this commonplace girl, good and true as she undoubtedly was, drive from his heart that which had so completely mastered him?

He left Mr. Ashton's house early, and for several days after he was not seen except at the meetings he was obliged to attend. Every day, wet or fine, he went out on the moors, as though they fascinated him.

He did not go near the Priory. Sometimes he climbed the hills and looked down at the old house which nestled among the trees; but he went no nearer—he dared not. He called to mind what Father Sheen had said about “A Retreat,” and wondered what it meant. He fancied Alizon kneeling in the little chapel and praying amidst a great silence.

He never intended, nor expected to tell Alizon Neville of the love which she had inspired in his heart, neither, indeed, did he take any steps in order to see her. Indeed, nearly a month passed away, and he kept away from the old house, then when the spring had fairly come he went across the moors in the very direction he had gone when he had first spoken to her. He was passing through the farmyard where he had heard her talking with the farmer's wife, when he saw her coming towards him from the farmhouse.

The blood surged into his pale cheeks, and his heart seemed as though it would burst. Still he mastered himself,

and when Alizon Neville held out her hand to him he seemed fairly cool and collected.

"You have forsaken us, Mr. Rutland," said the girl kindly. "Have you been especially busy?"

"No," replied Rutland, "no, I have not been very busy."

"Then why have you not been to see us? Have you been ill?"

"Yes—no—that is, I don't know."

She looked at him keenly. His manner bewildered her.

"Has anything been troubling you?" she asked kindly.

"Yes," he replied.

"I am so sorry; but your trouble has passed, I hope?"

"No, it has not passed."

He spoke roughly, almost rudely.

"I am so sorry," she said again; "but perhaps it will soon be gone."

"No, it will never be gone."

"Never be gone?"

"No, never."

He had not meant to speak in this way, but the girl's presence seemed to drag the words from him.

"Are you ill? Excuse me, I will gladly help you if I can."

He walked on by her side some time without speaking, while the girl wondered what ailed him.

"I must tell you," he said at length. "I did not mean to, and doubtless you will be angry with me, ay, scorn me, but I cannot help it. God knows I have fought against it, fought with all my strength—but it is no use."

She had no idea of what was in his mind. That he should dream of loving her had never appeared to her even as a dim possibility. She fancied that he might be worried about his church work. Of course it was that, or (and her heart beat with joy at the thought of it), was the truth

revealing itself to him? Yes, that was it. He had become dissatisfied with Protestantism, the truths of her religion had mastered him, even while he was a Protestant minister. She had prayed for this so earnestly, prayed that he might be led to stand up in the Industrial Hall and confess his error. It had seemed too good to be true, but God was good, and had answered her prayers sooner than she had dared to hope.

"Yes, tell me, Mr. Rutland," she said kindly, "tell me everything. Perhaps I can help you."

"You will be angry with me."

"Oh no, I will not; tell me. Perhaps I know more of what is in your heart than you think," and she looked up into his face with a kindly smile.

"Very well," said Duncan, his heart throbbing mightily at her words, "I will tell you."

CHAPTER XVI

RUTLAND'S CONFESSION

"EVERYTHING can be told in three words," said the young man, after hesitating a few seconds. "I love you."

"What !"

There was consternation, disappointment, anger, expressed in the word.

"Just that, Miss Neville. Oh, I knew you would be angry!" he continued, as he looked into her face. "I know I am mad ; I know that what I say must seem to you preposterous. But I cannot help it. For a month I have been fighting against it. I have told myself that I am a fool, a madman. But I cannot destroy the feeling. I know that you resent my making this confession. I am nothing to you but a heretic, to whom in the goodness of your heart you have been kind, but I cannot help it. I did not mean to tell you, but in this, too, I have been weaker than a child. Forgive me, Miss Neville !"

The girl answered never a word. The blood had mantled to her face, and her lips were tremulous. She had never thought of the young man in this way, nevertheless she could not listen to his words without being moved. She instinctively felt that they were honest. He meant what he had said, and there was something overmastering in his

presence. She admired him, cared for him far more than for Arthur Stanley, who was anxious for her to be his wife. He was more of a man in every way. Personally, he was more than the equal of the young squire, while intellectually the poles were between them. Had they belonged to the same——, but there, as he had said, his confession was absurd, and yet it was not unpleasant to hear. He might be a commoner, but he was a gentleman, and no girl is insensible to an honest man's love.

"You are angry," said Duncan.

"No," said the girl; "that is——"

"I am so glad," he cried, "so glad." He looked into her eyes. He saw that they were humid, and that her lips trembled. A great hope came into his heart. Perhaps—perhaps she might care for him. His love made him bold.

"Thank you," he interrupted. "It is kind of you to hear me, at least, with patience. I am afraid my love is hopeless."

"It is," said the girl, scarcely realising what she said, "at the same time—that is——"

"What?" cried Duncan. "Believe me, this is no passing fancy! I never loved a woman before. I never pretended to. I have never been thrown among young girls at all. During the years I was a student I lived for study; but—but you have changed everything, everything. Oh, I know I am foolish, but I cannot help it. I love you with my whole heart, my whole life. I know I am asking you what seems impossible; but you know that old Latin saying, *Omnia vincit amor*. Is there any possibility that it can be true? Can my love overcome all things? Can I by years of devotion win your love for me?"

Alizon did not speak. The young man's words had moved her, more than she thought possible. After all, his words were—but no——

"It is impossible, impossible, Mr. Rutland; think no more of it. You bring pain on both of us by persisting. Had I dreamed that you cared for me in this way, I would not have——"

But she did not finish the sentence. She had meant to say that she would not have invited him to the Priory, had she thought he would have fallen in love with her, but she was not sure about it. For she was very anxious for his conversion, and while she would not have participated in the plot of Ritzoom had it been revealed to her in its entirety, she was still prepared to sacrifice much in order to save his soul, and win a victory for the Church.

"Are you sure it is impossible?" said Duncan pleadingly. "Think again. No one could love you more truly, more devotedly than I shall love you throughout my life. I would give my life to make you happy. Don't discard me hastily. Think—may you not at some time learn to care for me?"

He was excited beyond measure, and did not see the thousand difficulties which stood in the way of the love he asked for.

Alizon hesitated a second. She longed too earnestly for his conversion to wound him; besides, during the last few weeks she felt more kindly towards him.

"It is no use my thinking, Mr. Rutland," she said at length, "even if I—I loved you, I should have to—to destroy my love. The very thought of such a thing would be madness."

"Why?" asked the young man. Now that the ice was broken, he felt bolder. Difficulties did not seem so formidable, and his love did not seem foolish.

"Surely you can see yourself?" she said.

"No, I cannot. That is—if you cared for me nothing would be impossible. I could brave anything, overcome everything."

"But, but——"

"You mean the social gulf that lies between us. I am a Nonconformist minister, while you possess an old name. You are, I suppose, rich, and I am poor. No, I had not thought of that. Love would overcome all that. Do you mean that?"

"No," said the girl, "I do not mean that. Such a thing would not have weight with me. I am enough of a Radical to know that neither poverty nor riches can make a gentleman, while I have known men bearing old names who—but I did not mean that. There is something of more importance than that. Surely you can think."

"No, no—not if you could love me," said Duncan. "You are not one who is influenced by the mere surface things. If you cared for me—yes, you would brave the anger of all you hold dear."

"But I could not brave my conscience."

"Your conscience!"

"Yes, my conscience. You forget that. Even if I loved you, I should feel it my duty to crush it, because it would be a sin."

"A sin!"

"Yes. How could it be otherwise? You are an enemy to my faith. Even in Lynford you have made perverts; while in many hearts you have sown the seeds of doubt."

"I see," said Duncan sadly. "You would feel it your duty to repulse me, because from your standpoint I am a heretic."

She did not reply, but walked by his side along the pathway through the fields. Strange to say, he had given no serious attention to this. If it had entered his mind he had dispelled it quickly. To him religious belief was a sacred thing, and while he hated anything which savoured of Sacerdotalism, he had never regarded it in this light.

"But, but Protestants and Catholics have loved each other, and have—have married," he stammered presently.

"I know it," she said, blushing; "neither does the Church absolutely forbid such unions. But to me it would be impossible. From my standpoint you are an unbeliever. Believe me—I do not mean—that is, you see how utterly foolish it is for you to——"

"But," and Duncan interrupted her suddenly, and he hardly knew why he uttered the words which sprang to his lips, "suppose this barrier did not exist, suppose I were a Catholic, suppose I could accept your faith in its entirety, what then? Could you ever learn to love me then?"

His eyes burned with a new light, and his voice was husky as he spoke. Alizon looked up into his face, and in spite of herself, her heart grew warm. After all, this man approached her ideal more nearly than any one she had ever met. There was no mistaking his sincerity; she could not gainsay the fact that she admired him greatly. She did not love him. She had never dreamed of him in that light; but why should she not? If he ceased to be a Protestant he might become a barrister, a journalist—a hundred things.

"Tell me!" persisted the young man eagerly, "tell me! This is more to me than you can think."

"Do you doubt your heresy?" cried the girl. "Do you feel that you could give it up for me?"

"I could give up anything, everything, for you—except the truth, and my own self-respect," he said. "But tell me, supposing I held your faith—what then?"

"I do not know," said the girl, "I cannot tell. Pardon me, but I wish to be perfectly honest with you. I do not love you. I never dreamed of such a thing. But I believe you to be sincere, and—and if you were true to the faith I hold—I—I—that is I do not know."

She had confessed more than he had dared to hope. She had not repulsed him entirely. She, the child of one of the oldest families in Lancashire, she who had been surrounded by all the refinements which wealth, culture, and an old name could give, she who, to him, was as far above the people with whom he had associated in all that makes womanliness beautiful, as the sun was above the earth, had listened to his mad declaration, and was still kind.

"God bless you for saying even that," he cried fervently.

"But I say nothing," replied the girl; "it would be wrong. Oh, please do not mistake me. I am afraid I am ignorant, foolish. But I believe you mean what you say, and no woman can think lightly of such words as those you have spoken!"

She spoke excitedly, almost incoherently, and her words conveyed more to the young man than she really meant.

"God knows," he cried, "that you hold my happiness in the hollow of your hands. Humanly speaking, I live only for you. I never loved a woman before, and I shall never love another. I suppose hundreds of men have said all this, and then have broken their words; but they have never felt what I feel."

"But I can promise nothing," said Alizon.

The young man did not reply; his eyes rested on the Priory, which was embowered among the trees away in the distance. The sight seemed to cause all sorts of strange thoughts to come into his mind.

"Do you think," said the girl eagerly, "that you ever could change—that is, your opinions?"

"No, I don't think so," said Duncan quietly.

"No?"

"I think not. I think not. I would do anything in my power even for the vague possibility of winning your love;

but I do not think, even if you promised to marry me, that I could do that."

She looked at him almost angrily; she had hoped from what he had said that there might be some hope. She had not given him a vestige of hope, and yet her pride was touched.

"Then you will do nothing?" she asked.

"Oh, yes! I shall go over every inch of the ground. I shall study all that your best writers and teachers have to say, I shall leave no stone unturned in order to find the truth. Yes, I will confess it; I shall do this because you have not crushed all hope in my heart. I do not see even the vaguest possibility of my becoming a Catholic, but I will learn all that there is to be said in its favour."

"Will you?" cried the girl eagerly. "Will you go and hear our preachers, and attend our retreats? If you will you will see, you will learn, I am sure you will."

"To do what I have promised seems tampering with the truth," said Duncan quietly, "but I will go over the ground again."

"Then you will be converted," cried the girl eagerly. "Oh, if you knew the joy of faith, the utter contentment that it brings. If you could realise what I have felt when I have partaken of the blessed Sacrament, if you could know the joy of being sure that the saints were pleading for you, you would not hesitate a second."

Duncan smiled sadly. From the earnest girl's standpoint, faith was easy; from his however, all was different. Still, her presence made it possible. If such as she were the product of Catholicism, the thing could not be evil.

They walked on together while the birds sang blithely. Even in that smoky part of Lancashire, Nature had clothed herself in her beautiful garments of green, and the air was laden with the perfume of new life. Away in the distance

they could see grimy Lynford, but the wind blew away the black volumes of sulphur and smoke, and so they could rejoice in the beauty of God's day.

"Will you not come into the Priory a few minutes?" said Alizon presently. "Father Ritzoom is still there, and Father Shoen is coming down this evening."

Duncan looked at her questioningly. He felt very sensitive about meeting Lady Neville after the confession he had made.

"Do you know," she went on, "that I should like to regard what you have said to me as unsaid."

"It can never be unsaid," replied Duncan, "and I am glad now that I have dared to tell you what is in my heart."

"What I meant was that nothing more need be said about it."

"Yes," replied Duncan; "but you have forgotten Lady Neville."

"No, I have not," said Alizon, blushing. "I tell my mother everything, but I do not think I need say anything about what you have told me. Let us both agree to—to forget."

He looked at her gratefully. He did not understand the purport of the girl's words. He could not realise the forces at work which suggested to her the idea of saying nothing to her mother about his confession. He was glad she had spoken in this way, however, because he felt sure that did Lady Neville know, she would forbid his entering the Priory again. And yet he would never for a moment have expressed a wish that she might not know everything. The truth was his whole nature was unhinged, and he scarcely realised what was right and what was wrong. As for Alizon, she was more influenced by what had taken place than she realised.

"Yes, I will go with you," he said presently. "I should like to meet Father Ritzoom again."

During their walk to Alizon's old home, Duncan did not once refer to what had been said; indeed, he spoke but little until they came to Boggart's Clough.

"You saved me from a great deal of rough handling here, Miss Neville," he said, as they stood near the spot where the men had attacked him.

"Please do not refer to it," said the girl, "I am angry with myself every time I think of it."

"Angry with yourself for keeping those men from making——"

"No, for uttering words which led them to do such a thing. But I was terribly angry with you, Mr. Rutland. When I think of what you have done, I am still. But you know us better now, don't you?"

"When I think of that night, I remember only your heroism," replied Duncan. "Whatever may be the future of my life, I shall always be glad that you were sufficiently interested in my welfare to take a weary journey to save me from harm."

"Oh, but that was nothing. I could not help it," replied the girl.

When they reached the Priory, Lady Neville greeted the young minister kindly. She seemed pleased to see him, and asked him to stay the evening. At first Duncan refused; but when both Alizon and Father Ritzoom seemed anxious for him to stay, he consented. Perhaps Ritzoom had even more to do with his decision than Alizon, for the Jesuit possessed a strange influence. The man always seemed to know more than he professed, his very silence was suggestive of knowledge.

A little later a conversation took place which influenced Duncan more than at that time he realised.

CHAPTER XVII

IDEAL CATHOLICISM

FATHER RITZOOM did most of the talking, and on this particular evening he seemed desirous of being agreeable. He showed a side of his nature, too, that he had not hitherto revealed.

During the winter Rutland had worked very hard on behalf of the poor and outcast in the town, and Ritzoom was led to speak about the poverty and want which existed in all the great capitals of Europe. He spoke feelingly too, and revealed a tenderness of which the young minister had not believed him capable.

"The Church has always tried to be a friend to the poor," he said, after many opinions were expressed, "always the friend of every great movement which means the amelioration of the want of the people. Of course, in England we can do but little."

"Why?" asked Rutland.

"First, because we are weak and few, that is comparatively. We have been robbed of our heritage, and our riches have been turned into wrong channels. But still we have hope."

"Hope; for what do you hope?" asked the young minister curiously. He was anxious to see into the mind of this man.

"I suppose you can scarcely understand," said Ritzoom. "You cannot appreciate our attitude. But we of the Catholic Church do not know the meaning of failure."

Rutland could not help smiling.

"You smile because you look at life through a microscope," said the priest. "Life must be seen differently. Truth cannot be learnt by magnifying what lies close to you. You must take a wide outlook. For four thousand years God was preparing the world for the Catholic Church; and before Christ left the world He founded that visible Church on earth. He gave His chosen apostles power, and that power has descended through channels which God Himself appointed. Since then the Church has never changed, never feared, never faltered. Of course, we have been abused, misrepresented, maltreated, but we have gone right on. We have never legislated for a day, a year, a century."

"For what have you legislated then?"

"For Eternity. That is why we have been misunderstood. Had we adapted ourselves to every passing mood we should perchance have prevented discontent; but the final outcome of such a policy would have been calamitous. We are like the God we serve, we live for all time; we think for all ages; we live in the past, the present, and the future. At times it might seem as though we have been defeated, but we have gone straight on, we have worked and planned as though these apparent defeats had never been. Again I say we are like God. God's providence seems at times to be set at naught. The wicked seem to prevail, and the right appear to fail; but God altereth not. That is exactly our attitude. God has told us of what is right, He has given us wisdom, and so we march steadily on. By and by, all we hope for will be accomplished."

"And what do you hope for?"

"Hope for?" The Jesuit rose from his chair and began to pace to and fro in the room. "Hope for! Our hope is to see the world one vast Theocracy. Even as the Jewish nation had at one time no king but God, so the world of which the Jewish nation was a type will have God as its supreme King. This is His will. He founded His Church. He appointed St. Peter as its head, and that headship has continued ever since in the successors of Peter. Sometimes those successors have been bad men, but their virtue has been not in themselves, but in their office. The man is but little, the office is everything. In a sense the Pope is not a man, he is the vicegerent of God. We do not think of Leo XIII., as Cardinal Pecci, but as the successor of St. Peter. He is God's chosen instrument; thus when he speaks of faith or morals, he speaks as God, not as man. Well now, think. Ever since the first Pope, the Church has been one. There have been heresies and schisms without number, but the Church itself has remained united. At some periods of its history it has seemed to be on the point of gaining all its desires. Notably when Gregory VII., the great Hildebrand, lived; but after his time came great reverses, and power seemed to be slipping from us. But it was only seeming. The power has always remained. By and by all the world will be the Church. There will be no heresy, for the Church will be one; there will be no discord, for all the members will be united in its Great Head; there will be no poverty, for the Church, having all power, will make such a thing impossible. Kings will exist; but they will be appointed by God. Governors will still be, but they will be governed by God. All will be God's, for all will be united in His Great Church, the Church which is God's, will be manifested in the world."

"But has this existed where the Church has had supreme power?" queried Duncan.

Ritzoom did not notice Rutland's interrogation. Instead, he paced the room excitedly.

"That is why the Church has never known race or country," he went on; "that is why she has regarded herself greater than governments, kings, or emperors. They are but for a day, the Church is for ever. Don't you see this? What is your idea of a Church here in this country? You have the Church of England. What a miserable limitation! The Church of England—the Church of a race of a few millions of men and women. We know nothing of such limitations. The Catholic Church is not the Church of Italy, or Spain, or Austria, or France. It is the Church of the world. Our priests are not English priests, or Italian priests; they are Catholic priests. All of them belong to one great army under one great Head. No matter what nation a man may visit, the Catholic Church is still the same; the services never change. We have our regiments, our battalions, our companies; we have our Orders whereby we can utilise various classes of minds and dispositions. For example, I am a Jesuit, then we have Franciscans, Dominicans, Capuchins, Trappists, Passionists, just as you have different regiments in one great army; but our marching orders are all the same, our faith is the same, we are all part of the great body of the Church. We always have been from the day Christ rose from the dead, we always shall be till the last trump shall sound."

"You have painted a fine picture," said Rutland, "but let us examine it a little closer. Let us analyse what you have said."

"Oh, of course you will do that; but nothing comes of it. You cannot analyse Providence, you cannot analyse sunlight. If you try to do this, you are no wiser at the end of your analysis than at the beginning. To tell you the

truth, I am sick of all these analyses. They only end in confusion and discord. Just see what all the discussions of the Church have resulted in. Disunion, petty sects, squabbling. Think of the religious life of England. Here you have hosts of sects. Suppose you have a man who wants to find faith. What authority have you? What have you to tell him? The Episcopal Church says one thing, the Methodists another, the Baptists another. None of the sects can say, 'We know.' Thus the man may spend his life in asking questions, and be no wiser in the end than at the beginning. But suppose a man comes to us. We have the authority of God, we speak with certainty, and all our priests speak as one. We have no Acts of Parliament formulating our creeds, because we are above Acts of Parliament. We have our times of seeming failure; but we go on all the same, and by and by all the sects will come to us, and yield allegiance to God; all the nations will become part of the great Church, and then at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow."

Ritzoom spoke with great earnestness. His face became as pale as death, and his great, square features seemed to grow in ruggedness and power. His eyes flashed brightly, his voice quivered with passion. In spite of himself, Rutland was moved by what the priest had said. Somehow he felt that the man was greater than the words he had uttered. He made them mean more than most men would be able to make them mean. He inspired Duncan's imagination, he made the young minister see what he wanted him to see, he led him to forget what he wanted him to forget. At that moment the Catholic Church appeared to Duncan as Ritzoom intended it should, a mighty army, all united, and led by God Himself; while the Protestant Churches seemed few, and weak, and discordant, quarrelling with each other, instead of doing the work of God.

"Forgive me," said Ritzoom when he had finished, "I have been very rude, very thoughtless. I ought not to have forgotten myself in such a way; but somehow I could not help myself. I spoke before I knew what I was doing. And now to atone for my misdoing I will not say another word on the subject."

So the conversation came to an end. It ceased just as Ritzoom intended it should cease, and then they chatted on general subjects.

"It has been a strange day," thought Duncan, as he sat in his study that night. "I feel as though I had been dreaming. I have told Alizon Neville that I love her, and she has not been angry, and I have promised her that I will study all those doctrines which, as a Protestant, I do not believe. Ah, but that was a wonderful picture that Ritzoom drew. I wonder now, I wonder if I have misjudged Catholicism. Oh, but it would be grand if the world were a great Theocracy. Fancy all the nations uniting in one great Church, the Church which has existed from the time of Christ. Ah! if it only could be!"

He sat far into the night thinking of what Ritzoom had said, and he pondered long over what his words suggested. After all, it was a beautiful picture, a grand ideal to strive after. It seemed so easy to believe just then; all the more easy, although, perhaps, he did not think of it, because the only condition on which Alizon Neville could ever accept his love was that he should accept her faith.

"I'll do as I said," he concluded at length; "I'll go over the whole ground again—and then——" but he could not conclude his thought.

And yet even the very possibility of Alizon Neville loving him was to him joy beyond words. He thought of her as she bade him good-night; her eyes shining, her lips wreathed with smiles, a perfect type of a pure, cultured,

English girl. And if he could become a Catholic, he might win her for his wife. True, she had made no promises; but she had given him a ray of hope. She had been kind to him; she had invited him to the Priory even after he had made his declaration; she had even suggested that what he had said should be regarded as a matter concerning which the rest of the world should have no knowledge.

For a moment he almost hated the thought of what he had said in the Industrial Hall; he felt almost sorry that he had unsettled the minds of some of the faithful Catholics.

Then his strong common-sense asserted itself, and his critical faculties demanded attention. He remembered the arguments he had used, and he saw the fallacies of Father Ritzoom's words. No, no, he could not accept this superstition, he could not consent to become a mere machine accepting the findings of other men. After all, this talk about the unity of the Church was a baseless dream—that is as Ritzoom understood it. Neither was he sure that uniformity of opinion was a good thing. Men must, if they would be true to the gifts of God, fight out their beliefs for themselves.

Still Ritzoom influenced him. His presence and his words that night left their impress upon him, and Rutland was not quite the same afterwards.

"I have promised to go down again in three days," he thought. "I wonder whether I ought to go? I am like a moth around a candle. It is madness for me to love her, still I must go. Let me see—what have I on Thursday? I remember now. It is the Congress of our Churches in this district. Yes, I can manage it. The meetings will be over about seven o'clock and afterwards I can go down for a quiet evening."

When Thursday came Duncan made his way to one of the large rooms in connection with Tudor Church, for a

meeting of the ministers and workers of the various churches belonging to his denomination in the district had been arranged to meet there. The young fellow had looked forward to the day with considerable pleasure. He hoped to meet with several of his old College friends, and anticipated their conversation concerning the spiritual condition of the churches with eagerness. Somehow, too, his conversation with Alizon Neville had made him able to work. Things did not appear so meaningless, so hopeless. The sun shone brightly, for Lynford, and as the wind drove the smoke away from the part of the town in which he lived, the air was clear and healthy. On the Tuesday and Wednesday, therefore, he had laboured long and steadily. From half-past eight in the morning until half-past one he had sat at his study desk, and from half-past two to six he had visited his flock, from half-past seven until ten at night he had attended meetings, and then each night until midnight he had remained in his study reading.

By Thursday morning, therefore, he had thought out his Sunday's sermons, and although he had not as yet written them, he had gathered his material; he had also made something like twenty calls, so that he felt quite free to devote the day to the meeting which was to be held at Tudor.

When he entered the room he found that a number of men had gathered. They were the ministers and officers of some sixty churches situated within a radius of thirty or forty miles of Lynford. At this spring gathering, the custom of this Congress was to consider the condition of the churches, and to suggest means for extending Christianity in the district.

After a few minutes of general handshaking and friendly greeting, the meeting commenced. After singing and prayer the minutes of a previous meeting were read, and

then the statistics of the district were announced. A great deal of attention was paid to this, and most of the members present took careful notes. Finally, the secretary of the meeting gave the exact totals. As the result of the year's labours of sixty ministers, scores of officials, and hundreds of Sunday School teachers, visitors, and general workers, there was a nett increase of one hundred and forty-five members in the churches. This was regarded to be on the whole a fairly satisfactory result, and a resolution was framed expressing thankfulness for the prosperity which had attended the efforts which had been put forth.

It was the first meeting of the sort which Duncan had ever attended, and as a consequence he was much interested. He listened to the speeches of the ministers, who spoke with great earnestness on the report, and weighed what had been said.

Presently some one asked the secretary to give them the position of the churches ten years before, so that they might consider their progress in that time. The result of this was by no means inspiring. There had been an increase of one church in the district, but the membership was practically the same as it had been then. And yet during that period the population of the district had increased by leaps and bounds. The churches of that particular denomination were practically at a standstill, instead of growing with the growth of the people.

Then some one asked for reasons for this apparent stagnation; and many unpleasant disclosures took place. In some of the churches there had been internal discord. One minister declared that his work had not prospered because a faction of the people had been against him, and had tried to undo all the good he was doing. Others, again, said that a worldly spirit was creeping over the people, and that

while prayer meetings were badly attended, concerts and popular entertainments attracted the multitude. The discussion lasted for about two hours, at the end of which time Duncan was feeling very uncomfortable. He could not help seeing that discussions of this nature had been taking place every year, and that there was very little practical outcome of all that was said. Some of the churches, he gathered, had succeeded, but the failure of others had caused the general increase to be but very small. He asked himself why this was so? Money was not wanting, for the trade of the district was prosperous, workers seemed plentiful, the streets were swarming with people, and yet the Gospel of Christ seemed to make no headway.

He listened to the suggestions of the members of the meeting, and they seemed to him poor and small. The outlook of these men was limited, they did not appear to have large ideals. The thought of Christianising the whole people, of saving the whole community, did not seem to possess them. And more than all this, the note of denominationalism was constantly struck. The great desire was evidently not so much the extension of Christianity, as the extension of denominationalism. To Duncan denominationalism was but a secondary matter. A denomination was but a medium through which Christianity might be extended. Doubtless there was no one in the meeting but who would say the same, and yet the main anxiety of many appeared to be concerning the medium through which the work was done, rather than the work itself. They dwelt on petty trifles, too, and little personalities were discussed rather than vital principles. Now and then some man, possessing a great soul, lifted the discussion to a higher platform, and dealt with large issues; but immediately after some little man got up and aired his

grievances, thus dragging spiritual realities into the dust of petty strife.

In spite of himself, Duncan could not help comparing these speeches with the words of Father Ritzoom. How poor all this was compared with the great scheme of the Catholics ! They did not discuss numbers in this way ; their idea was the uplifting of the whole world ; they desired to make all nations into a vast Theocracy. After all, weren't all these churches a mere rope of sand ? Where was the unitedness, the joining together for a mighty work ?

He saw that laymen spoke with the same authority as ministers, he saw that the opinions of some of the ministers were regarded as of but little value. Was not the sacerdotal idea a fine one after all ? According to Father Ritzoom, the ministers were a special body of men, given especial power and especial authority by God Himself. Was there not something in the idea ? If it were so, then they could speak with authority and power. They were not so many infants crying in the night, but members of the body of Christ to whom He gave special guidance, special wisdom.

Besides, the denomination to which he belonged was, compared with the Catholic Church, only of yesterday. A few centuries ago they were unknown, while far back, before England was a nation, the Catholic Church, knowing nothing of countries or governments, went on doing its grand work.

Among his brother ministers, moreover, he found doubt, unrest, uncertainty ; one man disagreed with another on points of doctrine, and both spoke falteringly ; with the ancient Church, on the other hand, there was no doubt, no unrest. Their doctrines had been defined by the Council of Trent hundreds of years back, and no change took place from year to year. It was true there was what was called

‘the development of doctrine,” and consequently the dogmas of “Papal Infallibility,” and the “Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary” had become established. But then, these dogmas had been decided upon by those who claimed to be God’s appointed ministers, those to whom the Holy Spirit had promised wisdom.

Would it not be grand to be freed from all this weary searching after truth, to rest on the bosom of an infallible Church, and do her work without questioning? Besides, if the Catholics were right, if God had through Christ established one Church, and one Church only, which was to be the Church of the world, and if this Church existed as an organic body, demanding certain conditions, then they were outside its pale, they were heretics.

He must think about it, the whole matter must be investigated to the very foundation. In the past he had read Catholic History from the rationalists’ standpoint; in the future he would consider what the Catholics themselves had to say on their claims and their history. If there *was* a true Church apart from all the wrangling sects of the world, and if *only* that Church had Divine authority, he would like to join it. He would read Newman’s “*Apologia Pro Vita Sua*” again.

At one o’clock the District Congress rose for dinner, and Duncan was struck with the hilarity which existed. They had evidently forgotten their comparative failure, and now settled down to enjoyment. After dinner a few returned to the meeting, while a number went for a walk among the hills, and did not return until the afternoon was far spent. Duncan spent his time with those who attended to the business of the day, and afterwards asked himself what good he had done by so doing. The discussion was mostly about the issue of certain schedules, some arguing that they should be sent out on April 30th, while others

declared that May 15th would be quite soon enough. The matter of these schedules took about an hour, after which the meeting spent its time in appointing committees, and hearing reports concerning certain institutions. At six o'clock the meeting was declared closed, and the members joined in the schoolroom for tea. Thus ended the day's work.

On reviewing matters afterwards, he reflected that after all he did not see how things could be altered much, and he knew that many of these ministers were doing good work in their churches, while forces were at work which could not be tabulated, and which were doing untold good. What troubled him was that no great effort was set on foot to save the community as a whole—that the sympathies of the meeting were rather denominational than universal.

After the members of the meeting had departed to their various homes, he wended his way towards the Priory. On his way he passed a chapel at which an entertainment was being held. He looked in, and saw about two hundred people present. They were listening to songs and recitations which were supposed to be of a very entertaining nature. The audience was laughing and clapping loudly, evidently the entertainment was popular. The singers and reciters used the rostrum for a platform.

"Is there not reason in the idea that a church should be a sacred place?" thought the young man. "Is it right that the house of God should be used for penny entertainments? I am told that the officers allow minstrels in some of the chapels."

A little later he reached the Priory. On asking for Lady Neville, he was told that all the family was in the chapel, where a Retreat was being held. Lady Neville had left word that she would be glad if he would wait in the library,

or if he would prefer she should be pleased if he would come to the chapel.

"I will go to the chapel," said Duncan, taking a sudden resolution. "I suppose Father Ritzoom is conducting the Retreat?"

"Yes, sir."

A minute later he entered the chapel.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAN AND THE WOMAN

HOW quiet and still everything was. How different from the noisy entertainment he had just witnessed. An air of sanctity pervaded the place. All the members of the household, and a few invited friends were on their knees, and in silence, and in deep thoughtfulness, they were offering their devotions. He looked towards Alizon. Her eyes were wide open, and she was looking towards a figure of the Virgin Mary. But in reality he was sure she looked beyond it. Her face was as pure as that of a vestal virgin, and her eyes were luminous, and filled with a holy light. There was no apparent excitement, no noise—all was reverent, everything was filled with the spirit of worship. For a second he felt like kneeling down with them, he felt sure it would be helpful after the experiences of the day. After the discussions to which he had listened, discussion on petty trifles, there was something beautiful in the thought of kneeling before the figure of the Virgin and meditating on the great work of her Son. And yet something kept him from doing so. After all it did not appeal to his deepest nature. All these crucifixes and figures were only attempts to materialise spiritual truths, and the very materialisation struck a false note. Besides, he remembered what all these things led to.

He saw Ritzoom at the altar, clothed in gorgeous vestments. This man professed miraculous power. He claimed that he could change bread and wine into the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. Again a false note was struck ; there was nothing suggestive of this in reading the Gospels, or the Epistles. And yet the atmosphere was laden with the spirit of worship, and he almost envied the worshippers, who, without a doubt, could enter into the ecstasy of the moment. The air was filled with the odour of incense, the light which shone through the coloured glass lit up the little chapel in such a way that everything seemed glorified. That the worshippers were sincere he did not doubt ; but, then, so were Mohammedans, Buddhists, Shakers, ay, every religionist of the world. Besides the atmosphere was spiritually exotic. There was no fresh, exhilarating, open-air feeling about it. There was nothing that nerved him to go out and fight with the devil, but something which might lead one to say, "Let us take refuge in a cloister, let us shut out the hard, unsympathetic world."

Presently Father Ritzoom rose to speak. His tones were soft and impressive. He appeared to be awed by his surroundings, and deeply impressed by the truths he wished to enforce. He explained certain points in the spiritual exercises they had been undertaking, and then gave certain advice as to their future conduct.

Rutland gathered that this was the closing hour of the Retreat, which had lasted for three days, and so everything tended to make the hour impressive. The priest urged upon the worshippers certain functions, and recommended certain aids by which their spiritual life would be benefited. He spoke of fasting, of contemplating the agony of Christ, of daily mass, and voluntary penance. Spoken to the few women who had spent long hours in vigil, his words un-

doubtedly seemed as the very words of God, but again Duncan felt that an artificial note was struck. All these suggestions appeared to the young man as mere palliatives, mere mechanical appliances which could have no abiding value. They made life poor and small. They wanted that grand ring which those great words of Christ contained. How different was this talk about penance, from that sublime saying of Jesus, "I came that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly." After all, these ceremonials of the priest, as he brought the Retreat to a close, was only playing at religion. It did not touch root principles.

Still, he was impressed, and thought within himself that possibly these exercises must be helpful to women, or how could they produce such a lovely character as that of Alison Neville. Besides, did not Newman (and Newman, according to Gladstone, and even Froude, possessed one of the finest minds which the century had produced), accept all dogmas and exercises of the Papacy *en bloc*? Yes, he must certainly read Newman again.

He left the little chapel before the others, and waited outside while the others came out. When Alison Neville appeared she was like one who had just been awakened out of sleep. Her eyes had lost the far-off look which he had seen in the chapel, she was like one dazed. He had seen people coming to consciousness after being in a mesmeric trance, and the young girl suggested this to him. She barely spoke to him as she passed. Lady Neville, on the other hand, was perfectly calm and collected, and welcomed him heartily.

The evening was spent very quietly. There was no joking, no merriment. They were apparently still under the influence of their devotions. When ten o'clock came Duncan announced his intention of leaving, and Ritzoom

asked for the pleasure of walking part of the way home with him. To Duncan's surprise the Jesuit spoke no direct word about religion. Instead he related some of his experiences in various countries. After they had separated, the young minister could recollect but very little that the priest had said, and yet he felt conscious that an impression was made upon him. The feeling that impressed him was concerning the immensity of the Catholic Church. In every way it was great. Its history was the history of nearly nineteen centuries. It was represented everywhere. Its influences had been felt ever since Christ left the earth. He remembered, too, the calm assurance with which Ritzoom spoke. He seemed to regard Catholicism as an irresistible power. Men might protest against it, they might disregard it, but it mattered not. It was marching on to victory.

Duncan did not go to the Priory for another week. During that time he worked constantly. From early morning till late at night he toiled. He marked out the duties of each day carefully, and executed them all without fail. On the following Sunday, too, he preached with great power, and yet the congregation felt that there was something unreal in his words. There was a note of asceticism and austerity in his sermons, different from the ordinary positive ring of his messages. Still, no particular attention was paid to it, for no one knew of the thoughts which were passing through his mind.

On arriving at the Priory, he was met with the news that Father Ritzoom was leaving the next day; he had already spent more time than he had intended in the district, and while he had been able to do a great deal of necessary work while there, he was obliged to return to Ireland at once. He hoped, however, to visit them again through the summer. He was exceedingly pleasant in his conversation, and Rutland could not help but admire the ease and

fluency with which he spoke. As far as the young minister could judge, Alizon Neville was sad and ill-at-ease; still she was kind, while Lady Neville continued to be very gracious.

While at the Priory he was under the influence which always impressed him while there. There was a stately grandeur about the place. Everything was free from the utilitarianism which pervaded Lynford, there was something in the atmosphere which made him think that these people lived in a world different from his own. He felt that he certainly must modify his views concerning the outcome of the Catholic religion. No one could go to such a house constantly, without realising the beautiful spirit that pervaded it. And yet he was no nearer being a Catholic than the first day on which he had met her, at least such was his belief, and when he left the house, he felt that a great gulf was fixed between him and Alizon Neville which could never be bridged across.

"Well, and what do you think of Mr. Duncan now?" asked Lady Neville of Ritzoom, when the door had been closed behind the young minister.

"Oh, he is a fine young fellow!" replied Ritzoom blandly, "I have not altered my opinion in the slightest."

"But do you still regard him as a possible convert?"

"Certainly," replied the Jesuit. "I am not in the habit of doubting after I have once made up my mind."

"But still he does not seem to draw nearer to us," said her ladyship sadly.

"You think not?"

"Do you?"

"His heresy had taken deeper root than I had thought, that is all," replied Ritzoom. "You need have no fear. In less than a year he will have bent his neck to the Church."

"I wish I could see some evidence of it," responded her ladyship.

Ritzoom turned his eyes towards Alizon, and saw that she was listening intently. He fully believed that Duncan had declared his love for her, and once or twice had almost made up his mind to question the young girl whether it was not so. Something in her eyes, however, had forbidden him, for he remembered that he was not her confessor, and that she was not one to brook interference.

"We have at least this evidence, Lady Neville," replied the Jesuit. "Never since he has been in the habit of coming here has he uttered one word against our Church. Surely that is something. Besides, all that pronounced Protestantism has gone. The influence of this home has been greater than you imagine. The seeds we have sown have begun to germinate, and soon they will spring up and bear fruit. Already he is dissatisfied with the dry bones of Protestantism."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure. He is not the kind of fellow who tells everything he feels. But he is wading through deep waters. We have made him feel the majesty, the unity, the great oneness of our Church. He has begun to think of the Divine authority of her priests, and soon he will follow in Newman's steps."

"You think he will cease to be a Protestant then?"

"He will first of all resign his position as minister of Tudor Chapel."

"And then——?"

"Ah, that is in God's hands, Lady Neville. But you need not fear. I have lent him many books, and I have told him some necessary truths; but these will not be the greatest factors in his conversion."

"No; what then?"

"You, Lady Neville, you and Alizon," and he looked at the latter keenly.

The girl blushed deeply, and Ritzoom was sure that all his surmises were correct.

"Explain, Father Ritzoom," said her ladyship.

"Such a home as this, such influences as yours, these by God's grace will melt his heart. It is not his brain to which we must appeal so much as to his heart, his emotions. Let him feel the tenderness of a Catholic home, let him realise how you yearn for his conversion."

Lady Neville was silent.

"I do not suggest that you should do anything but pray for him, and make him feel the beauty of a Catholic home," said the Jesuit. "That is all. God's grace will do the rest. When I come again there will be a greater change manifested. His conversion has taken longer than I anticipated; but you need not fear, it will take place. Let him think of this house as a home, and all will be well."

"You think you will be able to visit us again in September?"

"Yes, I hope so. Meanwhile, be very kind to him, both of you. And have no fear of results. On the day when he shall stand up in the Industrial Hall and make his confession, you will feel repaid a thousand-fold for your kindness. For his conversion will be the forerunner of hundreds more."

"Yes," said Ritzoom, as he left Lynford the next day, and looked out upon its numberless chimneys, "yes, I need not fear. I have failed sometimes. I failed with Lancaster—sadly failed; and Father Gray is but a poor Jesuit; he ought rather to have been a Capuchin; but I shall not fail this time. When Rutland is converted, I shall have an interview with the Holy Father, and when he

hears of numbers flocking to the Church in this centre of Nonconforming Protestantism, he will look on me with more favour than ever. It will take some months yet, but all is well. The girl will be the great factor, I can see it plainly, but I have done my part, although he is not conscious that I have done anything. I must try to visit the Priory in September. After all, Sheen's folly will turn out well."

At the very hour that the Jesuit was thinking out his plans for Rutland's conversion, the young man sat in his study fighting with his own heart. His love for Alizon Neville grew stronger day by day, while in spite of his Protestant training, he could not help being bewildered by what he had seen and heard. Father Ritzoom had made him realise the lack of unity that existed in Protestantism, had led him to feel that no Protestant minister could speak with the authority of a Catholic priest. But, then, was there any reality in these Sacerdotal claims? Of what good were pretensions unless they could be substantiated? He thought over these questions for many days.

"No," he said at length, "I must kill my love for Alizon Neville. I cannot be a Catholic, I simply cannot. Even if she would marry me, such a union would be madness. No, no; I must give her up."

This resolution, which he had failed to keep before, appeared to him again as his only hope. And yet the thought of its fulfilment seemed like death. His love held him entirely.

"One thing I can and will do," he determined at length. "I will abstain from going near the Priory. Even if I am invited there I will refuse. I will do all in my power to shut her out of my heart. But I will continue reading on the subject. I have promised that. I will get at the bottom of all those books which Ritzoom lent me. I will

study the forces which led such a man as Newman to change his mind."

Poor Rutland! he found it very hard to carry out his resolution. His heart simply ached to go down to the Priory and see the face of the girl for whom he would gladly lay down his life. And after all, why could he not be a Catholic? Catholics held all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and they had kept the lamp of faith burning in the darkest ages of the world's history. Was it not more likely that Newman and Manning should be right than he? Oh, to be able to take the step, to give up all anxious thought and be at rest!

A month passed away, and he never once saw the face of Alison Neville. Then a letter reached him, asking him to a small garden party of personal friends. June had now come, and the woods around the Priory were covered with their mantle of green. The flowers were blooming, and the air was warm and balmy. Why should he not go? It would be heaven to meet her. He read Lady Neville's letter again, and noted that only a few friends would be there. Perhaps Alison would walk alone with him among the woods, perhaps—perhaps——

"No, it is madness, madness," he cried aloud; then he seized a pen, and thanked Lady Neville for her kindness, but told her that it was impossible for him to come. Another month passed away, and then his resolution was put to a still stronger test. He met Alison and her ladyship one day as they were driving across the moors whither he had gone for a walk.

"You are a great stranger," said her ladyship. "Why have you forsaken your friends?"

Duncan said he had been working night and day, and this was true, but as he knew, it was not the reason he had not visited the Priory.

"But surely you could spare us an hour," she said; "we have been expecting you. Haven't we, Alizon?"

"Yes," replied the girl, and the young man's heart felt like bursting as he saw the colour mount her fresh young face.

"We shall begin to think we have offended you. Have we?"

"Offended me!" cried Duncan. "No! no! Anything but that! But really, I have been very busy, and very much worried."

"Worried?" queried her ladyship, with a touch of real kindness in her voice. "I am so sorry. But perhaps a day's freedom from your work and thoughts will help you. Everything is quiet at the Priory now. Come down for a day soon, will you?"

"Thank you," cried Duncan, and his voice was husky. "You are very kind. I should like it above all things, but——"

"No, I shall have no buts; let me see, to-day is Saturday. Well, we shall expect you on Monday. That is settled now."

And before he was able to answer the carriage was a dozen yards away.

"Oh I should like to go, but I cannot, I dare not," he cried, "I should only have to fight all this over again!"

When he reached his lodgings he wrote a letter to her ladyship expressing his sincerest thanks for her great kindness, but told her that his mind was so torn with conflicting doubts, that he was altogether unfit for society.

And so he tried to drive Alizon Neville from his mind. Ever since Ritzoom had left Lynford, he threw himself with more ardour than ever into his work. Indeed, so constantly did he labour that his health began to suffer. Although it was now summer, the season of the year when

much of the especial work of the winter was abandoned, he inaugurated new schemes, and threw himself into them with such ardour that even those who had been opposed to him confessed, "that Rutland was a rare lad after all." But those who cared for him most grew anxious. They saw his cheeks grow paler and thinner, while his eyes appeared to grow larger, and to shine with an unnatural light.

"Thou'lt kill thyself," said they kindly, "shut off steam a bit, lad, an' tak' it aisy."

But this Rutland was unable to do, for he felt that not only his duty, but his real salvation lay in the direction of work.

During August he heard that Lady Neville and Alizon had left the Priory, and he yielded to the desire of the church officers to take a rest. Accordingly he went to Blackpool, the popular resort of the Lancashire operatives; but he only stayed a few days. He could not bear the crush of people, he had no sympathy with the noisy amusements. Accordingly he returned to his work at the end of August, and continued his labours.

When September came matters reached a crisis. He was out walking one Monday afternoon, feeling very weary after his Sunday's services, when he saw Alizon Neville coming towards him. It was now a year since he had settled at Lynford, and he was trying to think of the progress the Church had made since his advent. After all, his work had been abundantly blessed. The regular congregation had been practically doubled, and every department of Church work had been strengthened and invigorated. He then tried to think of how the work could be further extended during the winter, and sketched some plans which he intended to bring before the congregation on the following Sunday. His ideas were all dispelled.

however, when he saw Alizon. His hands began to tremble, and his cheeks were flushed with an unhealthy colour.

"Mr. Rutland," said the girl, "you look ill."

"Do I?" he replied. "I think I am all right."

"The people in the town say you are working yourself to death," she said anxiously. "I hear, too, that you have practically refused to take a holiday."

"I could not bear to be idle," he replied.

"But you should compel yourself. Lynford cannot afford to lose you."

"I am not sure," he replied somewhat cynically. "People have short memories. If I were to die they would give me a decent burial, and then forget me in six months."

"That is not fair to the people," she replied.

"No?" he said, looking into her face. He thought he saw her lips tremble, and then all his resolutions went to the wind. While he was absent from her he was strong, but in her presence he was powerless.

"Will you let me walk home with you?" he said almost humbly.

"Yes, come down to the Priory," said the girl, "my mother will be delighted to see you."

They were standing on a footpath a mile from the Priory, but were still close to the woods which surrounded the house.

"Let us go by the private path through the woods," she continued, and she led the way. A few minutes later they were walking together beneath the tall elms.

"Why do you work so hard?" she said presently.

"I have been trying to drive you out of my mind."

Alizon blushed a rosy red.

"When we were last together some months ago," he

continued, "I told you that I loved you. You gave me but little hope, and you said that even if you cared for me you should regard your—your interest in me as a sin while I remained a Protestant."

"Yes," said Alizon quietly.

"Well, I love you more than ever. I cannot kill it. I have tried to. That is the reason I have not accepted Lady Neville's kind invitations."

"Then you are still a Protestant?"

"Yes, yes. I—I cannot be untrue to myself, even for you."

For a moment the girl forgot the part she was playing in his life. She thought only of his conversion to her faith.

"But have you read the books Father Ritzoom lent you?"

"Oh, yes," he replied with a bitter laugh.

"And they have not convinced you?"

"Convinced me! No, they have not convinced me."

"But would you—that is, do you desire to——"

"God forgive me, Miss Alizon, I would give anything to accept your faith. Oh, I wish it were reasonable—for then I should hope that I could win you. I would do anything, everything for even the hope of winning you; but I cannot be a liar to God!"

"Have you read Newman?"

"Yes."

"His '*Apologia*'?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then surely, if he, the greatest thinker of the century, could yield to Rome, you could——"

"Forgive me for interrupting you," said Duncan. "I am tired of this talk about Newman being the greatest thinker of the century. I commenced to read his '*Apologia Pro Vita Sua*' with that idea. I suppose my opinion is heresy;

but I cannot help it. A more unconvincing book I never read. It seemed to me a piece of intellectual jugglery from beginning to end. It could never convince any thinking man. I wanted to be convinced—for your sake. I tried to see as he saw. I read his celebrated tracts; I hungered to enter into his frame of mind. But it was impossible. People call him a philosopher. I have understood that a philosopher always sees to it that he has first of all a sure basis for his conclusions. Newman conceived a certain idea of the Church, and then drew certain conclusions from it. But Newman's conception of a Church is poor, artificial, childish. He was simply playing at religion all along the line. To him it is a poor, shrivelled little caste, governed by arbitrary rules. I will admit that there is a great deal of clever sophistry; but there is no broadness of outlook, no greatness of conception. Why, think of his protest at the time the Bishop of Jerusalem was appointed. He protested against a Bishop giving the sacrament to Lutherans and Calvinists without an examination of their beliefs, when the strength of religious life in Europe has largely sprung from the work of Luther. He deals with paltry issues. His idea of faith seems to be the acceptance of certain views on little details which have no more to do with real religion than the ribbons on your dress. Excuse me, Miss Neville, but Newman would drive me to Agnosticism rather than to faith. I could not believe in an Omnipotent God and Newman's teaching at the same time."

"Ah! but," said the girl sadly, "you have never yet seen our Church as it really is. You look from the outside."

"Where shall I go to see it?" asked Rutland.

"Oh, I am sure," she went on, "that if you could see it where it was all powerful you would be convinced. Here in Lynford we are but an alien Church. Our people are

mostly poor and uncouth. But if you could see the Church in Rome—then all would be different.”

Rutland went on a few minutes without speaking, then he burst out eagerly—

“But can you not care for me as I am? For I do love you, I *do* love you!”

“It would be sin for me to think of you in the way you wish, Mr. Rutland, while you are engaged in the work of spreading heresy.”

“But if I *could* be a Catholic—then? Could you love me then?”

“I—I don’t know. I regard you very highly—now; but I don’t know. Perhaps I might.”

“And—and——”

“No, Mr. Rutland, I cannot say more. Perhaps I have said too much now. But surely if you love me as you say you do—you could—— Oh, Mr. Rutland, you make everything impossible. You—you do not try!”

There were tears in her eyes, and Rutland saw them. Both of them were excited beyond measure, and scarcely knew what they were saying. They were both young, and the girl could not help being influenced by the passion in the young man’s words.

“Try, try!” cried Rutland. “God knows I am trying. But give me some word of hope!” He grasped her hand and held it tightly.

“I do not know,” she cried, “I do not know. I—I wish I could—that is—even if I were able, even if I loved you, I would destroy it, though it killed me, rather than commit the sin of being untrue to my faith.”

“Then there can be no hope for me while I am a Protestant!”

“No, no; I dare not. It would be sin—deadly sin.”

“Sin to love a man who was trying to do his duty, to do

right!" he cried. He dropped her hand. "I am a fool," he continued bitterly. "You never can care for me, you could not under any circumstances, you could not if I were of your faith."

"Oh, do not say that!" she cried. All her caution was gone. She forgot the difference in their positions. She was a woman, and he was a man, and that was all. "I—I could, I believe I—I could not help myself if it were not a sin!"

"But otherwise?"

"Oh, I could not, I dare not. Don't be cruel!"

He caught her hand again, and held it tightly.

"God help me!" he cried, and then he left her without a word.

A fortnight later he was lying on his bed with brain fever, brought on, the doctor said, by overwork and worry. For days his life hung in a balance, and even when the danger was over, his recovery was slow, so slow that it was not until after Christmas that he was able to walk about.

"You must leave Lynford for the rest of the winter," said the doctor, when he had reached this stage.

"Where must I go?" he asked.

"Oh, southward. To Nice, Algiers, Cairo."

"Would Rome do?"

"Yes, splendidly."

"Then I will go there."

He gave no reasons for this decision; but a fortnight later he was on his way to the Eternal City, little dreaming of what lay before him.

CHAPTER XIX

"ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME"

RUTLAND had no companion on his journey to the home of the Vatican. Some of the members of his congregation had hinted that if he would wait a few weeks until they could make arrangements they would accompany him. But he did not encourage their advances. He wanted to be alone, wanted to be free from all prying eyes, as he studied the Papacy at its centre. The local paper had announced that he intended taking the journey, and so all the town knew of it, and a number of people came to the station to see him off when he started for London, the first stage of his journey.

Among these were Matthy Bray and Jonas Dixon.

"Naa see that thaa comes 'ome wi' a bit o' colour i' thee faace," they said.

"I'll try," said Rutland, with a wintry smile.

"'Appen as aa the Pope 'ev 'eerd on thee, and 'appen 'e'd want to see thee. If 'oo does, tha tell 'im as aa us Lancashire foak want nowt of his tribe."

"All right."

"And look 'ere," said Jonas Dixon, "see that thaa doesn't pick up wi' ony Italian lasses. Thou'lt find nowt there as good as we 'ev i' Lancashire. Eh, but thou ought to 'ave 'ad a wife to tak' care o' thee!"

"I'll promise to keep clear of them all," said Duncan.

"Yi, that's right. I tell thee, lot o' th' Tudor lasses 'ave 'ad wet eyes while thou'st bin i' bed. Ef owt 'appens to thee all th' town 'll go into mournin'. I main it. Thou mayn't think it, 'cos we doan't say over mich; but we think a lot o' thee. I'm tellin' thee naa. Us be a bit rough, I reckon, but ther'll be 'undreds o' foak prayin' for thee," and Duncan saw the tears in the old weaver's eyes.

"Yi, and that ther' will," said old Matthy Bray. "But tak keer o' thysen, Mester Rutland, I've 'eerd as aa the Italians carry knives wi' 'em, and that they fair 'aate th' Protestants."

"I'll be careful," laughing at Matthy's primitive ideas.

The express train came in, and scores of people thronged around him. Youths and girls, men and women, all waiting to shake his hand and wish him God speed.

"We'll be rare and glad to see yo back," they said. "God bless yo'."

The train swept out of the station, and left the crowd on the platform.

"Eh, but yon's a grand lad," they said one to another. "Ther's never been his equal i' Lynford. It 'ud be a sad day for Tudor if he left it."

"Yi, it would," said another. "Oo's been a rare defender o' th' faith."

Meanwhile Duncan sat in the carriage thinking of the future. He was still weak, and had arranged to accomplish the journey in easy stages. He had received a letter from Lady Neville, containing kind expressions, and the fervent hope that he would soon be restored to health, and also recommending him to a comfortable hotel. Unknown to him, moreover, Father Ritzoom had written to several of

his friends in Rome, telling them of his hopes concerning him, and asking them to show him every courtesy.

Each day since the doctor had given his consent for Duncan to read, the young man had been studying books on Rome, and trying to get an insight into the condition of the city. He had become much interested in the endeavour of the Popes to try and retain temporal power, and had often looked at the picture of St. Peter's and the Vatican, and had noted the windows of the room where the aged Pontiff spent his days. Popular rumour had it that Leo XIII. often stood at that window and looked out over the city which was lost to him. It was also said that he indulged in dreams of the time when the Papal States should be restored to the Vatican, and he should have Imperial as well as spiritual power. When the train had left the manufacturing districts, and drew nearer to London, the purpose of his visit to Rome became clearer to him. The people of Tudor had no idea why he had chosen Rome rather than Cairo or Algiers, but it was painfully real to him, and presently he was able to review the situation clearly.

Sometimes he wondered whether he was behaving quite worthily ; but he really could not see how he could have acted differently. He could not help himself, neither could he have controlled the order of events. He could not accept the teachings of the Catholic Church ; but he could not resist being impressed by the picture of the Church which Ritzoom had brought before his mind, neither could he help feeling the beautiful atmosphere of that Catholic home at the Priory. Had he not been brought into contact with Alizon Neville and Father Ritzoom, his life would doubtless have been different ; but both had come across the pathway of his life, and both had impressed him. They had made him feel the greatness, the grandeur of the

Catholic Church, had appealed to his love for the beautiful, the stately, and had caused him to see visions of a great united Christianity all over the world. After all, it could not be God's will to see the Church split into sections, and each party glorifying its own little sect. Surely God meant His Church to be one. Well, had not the Roman Church remained true to this idea? She was the same all over the world. True, he recognised the fact that the Reformation had given religious liberty, but had not that liberty degenerated into license? Besides, even a man like Goethe had condemned the work of Luther and his followers. There could be no doubt that liberty degenerated into license. Rome was no longer what it once was; she had been represented as a great loving mother waiting to welcome back her wayward children, and she had purged herself from the corruptions which were once destroying her. There *was* something in the idea of an infallible Church; something wondrously fascinating in the thought that poor, tired souls could rest on her great bosom and give doubts and fears to the wind.

All this Ritzoom had made him feel, and now that he was weak and ill, weary and worn from long weeks of studying and struggling and fighting, he longed for rest and peace.

But perhaps these things would not have affected him so much had not a great overmastering love for Alizon Neville come into his life. He felt instinctively that her life was pure and beautiful. She appealed to all that was holiest and best in him. And she had given him hope. The only thing that seemed to stand between them was the difference in their faith. He did not think of the bitter opposition which Lady Neville would offer, if he made known his wishes to her. He had no idea of the power of caste, and how one in her position would never give her

consent for her daughter to link her life with such as he. Lady Neville had expressed such liberal opinions, and had received him with such kindness that it seemed probable that she would overlook the difference between their birth and training. After all she must recognise the truth of Burns' words, that the rank was but the guinea stamp, and that the man was the gold. Perhaps, too, the difference in their religion, which had been urged by Alizon as the reason she could not think of loving him, had seemed so great that it overshadowed everything else. And surely he owed it to her, to himself, to do all in his power to remove the obstacle that stood between them. They were fellow Christians. Both believed in God, and Christ, and in the great fundamentals of Christianity. It was only a difference in detail which divided them. He had no doubt about his own relation to God, no doubt about his right to preach the Gospel, but, then, if the Catholic idea of the Church was true—well, at least, he ought to use every means to investigate it. Books had altogether failed to convince him. Newman had driven him further away from sacerdotalism; Purcell's "Life of Manning" had destroyed many illusions. All the same he would see Rome, study the effect of this wondrous system where for fifteen centuries its power had been almost supreme. And then—well, he would follow the leadings of God.

He had told his Church nothing of this. It would have done harm rather than good had he done so. The people would not have understood. And he had done his duty at Lynford. On all hands it was admitted that he had done the work of two men; on all hands, too, he was told that never had a minister been so successful.

If he were ever led to resign Tudor—well, he must face the fact fairly. In any case he must do his duty.

He stopped one night in London, another in Paris.

another at Turin, another at Genoa, and at each stage of the journey he felt himself gaining strength. It was a wondrous change to him. At Lynford the sky was black, murky, the air was smoke-sodden, and winter reigned supreme. In Italy the sky was cloudless, the air was clear and soft and balmy. He had arrived at Genoa at noonday, and after he had lunched he went out into the town. Everywhere the evergreen trees glinted in the sunshine. He wandered around the square where the statue of Christopher Columbus stands and gazed about him. Ah, it was glorious to be away from the smoke and grime, beautiful beyond words to breathe the pure air of the sunny south. He walked slowly around the town, and by and by reached the suburbs. Here the gardens were filled with orange trees, and the luscious fruit was ripening beneath the warm, bright sun. He went towards the sea, where the waters of the Mediterranean lapped the shore. Behind him stood the mountains. Away, away, as far as the eye could reach, they lifted their giant peaks into the clear, blue sky; beneath and beyond him were the waters of the Mediterranean. Italy seemed to him like a land of dreams, of fair visions.

He was tempted to stay at Genoa, but he wanted to be in Rome, whose name had for two thousand years been a synonym for civilisation, for art, for culture. As a boy he had dreamed of going there, as a man he had longed to go, and now he was on his way. Somehow he felt that his life's destiny lay in Rome, so the next day at noon he started on the last stage of his journey.

Prudence told him to stay at Pisa, and rest the night there. He was still languid and weak—a few weeks before he had been at the very portals of death. He ought to rest there, and not overtax his newly returning strength. But he was too eager to be in Rome, too eager to see

those sights which he felt would mean the turning point of his life.

He drew near Rome shortly before midnight, after a weary ride through a wide stretch of dreary country, and as he looked out of the carriage window he saw the lights of the city.

Rome! Rome! He grew excited. This city, hoary with age, and laden with mystery, was near at last. He thought of Romulus, who 700 years before Christ founded a mighty empire, thought of the great heroes who succeeded him, thought of the old Romans who conquered the neighbouring peoples, of the republic that was formed, and of the Cæsars who sat on the Imperial throne. Rome! the city to which Paul came, and where he was persecuted and killed; the city, too, where, legend had it, Peter came, and was crucified. Here, too, Constantine came and bent before the conquering cross; to Rome also came Charlemagne, and handed over kingdoms to the Pope. Rome! Rome! there was music, mystery, romance in the word. He seemed to see the sweep of centuries as he sat back in the carriage-seat and closed his eyes. He pictured one Pope after another reigning there. He saw Hildebrand scheming to make the world kneel to him, he pictured Huss coming to Rome to tell his dream to the Pope, saw Leo arranging for the erection of St. Peter's, and beheld Luther coming barefooted and alone to the Eternal City. Then he pictured it after the Reformation, and thought of Pius, and Paul, who, with stern relentlessness, sent out their edicts concerning heretics. He thought of the findings of the Council of Trent, of the rise of Ignatius of Loyola, and the founding of the Jesuits. He fancied Gregory on his way to St. Peter's to thank God for the massacre of St. Bartholomew, and thought of St. Ignatius longing to come to Rome, but hesitating until he saw a vision of Christ,

who told him that He would be with him. Then the history of Rome's decay appeared before him. He saw the power of the Vatican lessening year by year, until the Popes began to tremble for their own safety. England and Germany, instead of returning to the Latin Church, drifted further and further away, while France, the eldest daughter of Rome, plunged into mad orgies and wild revolt against organised religion. Then Napoleon came, and played with the Pope as he played with the rest of the world, until the power of the Vatican was but a thin shadow of its former greatness. He thought of the schemes of Mazzini and Garibaldi for the Unification of Italy, and how, after heroic struggles and much bloodshed, the nation was re-born, and every state, with the exception of Rome, became united according to the dream of the Italian patriots. He fancied the French army defending this one Papal State against Italy, and then saw the French soldiers march away only to be crushed by the Germans. How the pride of Pius IX. must have suffered! And still this man, while yielding outwardly, held tenaciously to his opinions and demands. The dogma of Papal Infallibility became the faith of the Church, and afterwards the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. Then Pius IX. died and Leo XIII. sat on the Papal Chair; and this poor old man, after years of scheming and waiting, still hoped and longed for Imperial power. He fancied Leo XIII. standing at his window at night and looking over the city thinking of the time when it belonged to the Church, and dreaming of the day when it should be again governed from the Vatican. Poor old man! It was a pathetic thought, and yet there was something sublime in it. The Church, so Father Ritzoom said, never legislated for a day, a century, but for eternity, and Leo would claim to be a link in the Eternal Chain of the Church. Cardinal

Manning had said that it was the work of the Church to bow the neck of an Imperial race, the English race, to the claims of Rome. Would this ever come to pass, would the dreams of Leo be ever realised?

His thoughts and fancies were dispelled by the cry of "*Roma! Roma!*" and he alighted from the train to see an excited throng. Giving his luggage to a porter, and telling him the name of his hotel, he followed him until they reached the hotel 'bus, and a few minutes later he was on his way to the Grand Hotel de Russie, where he had arranged to stay.

Although the day had been warm, the night was cold, and Rutland was glad on his arrival to find that the dining room had been heated, and a good supper provided. He was still excited, and he had no desire to sleep, but he remembered his recent illness, and soon found his way to his bedroom, where he immediately fell fast asleep. He was up betimes in the morning, but he did not intend to start sight-seeing for a few days. He desired rather to wander around the city, and become acquainted with its streets and squares before visiting the churches, and studying the life of the people. There was no need for him to hurry. The doctor had told him that he must on no account return under two months, and the Church had requested him to stay until his health was perfectly restored. A letter had also reached him from the manager of one of the Lynford banks, telling him that arrangements had been made whereby he could, by applying at one of the Italian banks, obtain enough money to cover a much larger expenditure than he was likely to make. The manager assured him that this sum was deposited at his own bank by a friend (who desired that his name should be unknown) in his, Rutland's, name, and for his use, and that he must not hesitate to take advantage of the arrange-

ment. The young minister was much moved by this expression of kindness—at the same time he determined not to benefit by it. He had a little private property, and as he had not spent the whole of the salary his Church had given him, he knew that he had no need to trouble about money.

He determined not to hurry himself therefore, and for three days he simply walked around the city, threaded its main thoroughfares, and watched the throngs of people who passed by, without in any way troubling about the purpose of his visit. These three days were not without their effect upon him, however. It is impossible to be in Rome without being impressed, impossible to see the old and the new, the Pagan and the Christian struggling together without being moved to wonder. During those three days he traversed Rome from side to side, and familiarised himself with the names and positions of streets and squares; he wandered among the ruins of the Forum, traversed the Corso, watched the Tiber in its sweep towards the sea, and saw the mighty dome of St. Peter's, and the great irregular buildings which comprised the Vatican. He had not sought to understand the inwardness of all these things; he had declared that he would not seek to study anything for at least a week, and yet Rome stunned him. He could not help marvelling at its revelation; sometimes he felt as though he was but dreaming a strange dream, from which he would soon be awakened. And yet, although he knew it not, he was adopting the best method of seeing Rome, he was preparing himself to see the wonders which would be revealed to him later.

At the end of three days, however, just as he was thinking of trying to discover some man who knew the history of Rome, who might be willing to explain to him some of the sights, a waiter came to him and handed him a card.

"Who can wish to see me?" thought Rutland. "As far as I am aware there is not a soul in Rome, who knows me."

He glanced at the card and read the name.

"Rev. Richard Matthew, S.J.," he read. "Who can he be, I wonder?"

He followed the waiter into the drawing-room, where he saw a young priest.

"Excuse me for calling," said this young man, "but some English friends of mine told me you were here, and I thought I might be of service to you. I have lived in Rome a good many years, and know the city well."

He seemed rather nervous, but he had a kind, frank face, and Rutland felt drawn to him immediately.

"Sit down, will you?" he said cordially.

CHAPTER XX

THE HOME OF THE PAPACY

THE young priest accepted Rutland's invitation, but both soon discovered that it was impossible to converse with any degree of comfort. All around them was a crowd of people talking and gesticulating. It reminded Rutland of the tower of Babel; French and English, Germans and Russians, Italians and Spaniards were jabbering incessantly, and all seemed bent on making quiet conversation impossible. So Rutland led the way into the billiard-room, which was quite deserted. He then ordered coffee and cigars, and having drawn two arm-chairs close together they were enabled to talk.

"This is indeed kind of you," said the young minister heartily. "I have been longing to find some one who knows Rome well, and you come as a sort of *Deus ex Machina*. But who told you I was here?"

"I had a letter from Father Ritzoom," said the young priest; "he told me that you were acquainted, and that you would probably be lonely here. He asked me to call on you, and offer you any help in my power."

"I am just a bit lonely," said Rutland. "Of course, I have just begun to have a speaking acquaintance with a few people, but then I know no one. Most of the visitors here

have their own circle of friends, and I am quite alone. I feel very grateful both to you and Father Ritzoom."

"As to that," said Father Matthew, "I am inclined to think the advantage is not all on your side. I am as glad as a bird to get away from the ordinary routine of my life, and if we can go around together for a few days I shall be more than delighted."

"Do you mean to say," cried Rutland, "that you can accompany me around the city?"

"If you will have me," said the priest. "Father Ritzoom has great influence with my superior here, and knowing that the ordinary guide is worse than useless, he requested that I should be your companion in your peregrinations. You see, almost every church here has an interesting history, while every square, every column, and every bit of ruin is associated with romantic incidents. Besides, I can give you an insight into the life here, and I can enable you to see things altogether out of the reach of the ordinary tourist."

"Why, this is charming of you!" said Rutland. "I know something of the ordinary guide, and had determined to avoid him. I know just a little of Italian, but only just enough to make me exasperated at my own ignorance. You speak the language well, I expect?"

"Oh yes, I have lived here for years! I am Irish by birth, and was partly educated there, but I speak Italian as well as I do English. By the way, you would, perhaps, like to see Father Ritzoom's letter to my superior," and he passed some papers on to Rutland.

The young man read eagerly. It was full of friendly expressions towards himself, and expressed the hope that Father Rizzio would be able to spare young Father Matthew to show Rutland the sights of Rome, and explain to him those things in which he might take a particular

interest. The letter, moreover, spoke of Rutland as being on friendly terms with Lady Neville, and a young man of considerable influence in the town of Lynford. It gave no hint as to the position he held, nor of the part he had taken in the controversy in the town.

"This is very kind of Father Ritzoom," said Rutland; then with characteristic frankness he continued, "but I think you ought to know, Father Matthew, that I am a Protestant, and what is more, a Protestant minister of religion."

"Are you?" said the young priest cordially, "then we shall have more interests in common. Pray do not think that what you have said will make any difference. Of course, I presume Father Ritzoom was acquainted with this fact when he wrote."

"Oh, perfectly," said Rutland. "I wonder he did not mention it in the letter."

"I suppose he did not think it worth while," said the Jesuit. "He knew it would make no difference to us. Besides, do you know I am in some way related to the renowned Father Mathew, the great apostle of Temperance, and I should be libelling my name if the fact of your being a Protestant made me less willing to serve you," and there was a frank, kind expression on his face which made Rutland believe his words without question.

"And do you know anything of the life of the Vatican?" asked Rutland.

"Oh yes, I know something of it. Of course, as a Jesuit, we never aim at a position of honour in the Church. Our vows practically preclude all ambitions for high places. Still Father Rizzio has great influence with the Holy Father, and is naturally much connected with the Vatican. Would you like to see his Holiness?"

"Yes, I should like to see him very much. Of course I

should not think of an interview with him, but it would be interesting to see him, and to note the impression he makes on the people."

"Oh, that can be managed. I will speak to Father Rizzio about it, and he will arrange for you to see his Holiness. By the way, when do you wish to start?"

"What, sight-seeing?"

"Yes."

"I should like to begin at once. I am quite strong enough now. Do you know I have been very ill? But I feel quite able now to take any amount of exercise. The air is so pure here, so clear, and crisp, and exhilarating, that I can eat like a farm labourer. Perhaps the best plan would be for me to hire a carriage by the day, and then go from one place of interest to another."

"Yes, that would be all right; but you had better have some system in seeing Rome. It is not like an ordinary city."

"I have seen that; but what would you suggest?"

"Well, it depends. You see there are three Romes. There is ancient Rome, there is Rome as the capital of Italy, and there is Rome as the head of the Church. Which do you wish to see?"

"Oh, Rome as the head of the Catholic Church. But, then, are not the three connected? Can one understand one without studying the other?"

"Scarcely," replied the young priest. "I think the best way will be to begin by studying the plans and Ideals of the Church. I will introduce you to Father Rizzio, and he will give you an idea of our missionary organisations, and I can obtain interviews with the heads of other departments of our work. After that you will be prepared to see our churches, and to know something of their history. You see every nation in the world is represented here.

Every nation has its church, and every church has its history. The Jesuit Church is simply a wonder, while the church for the English Catholics is wondrously fascinating. It contained the head of John the Baptist for about a thousand years. I happen to know something of the history of all the principal churches, and I shall be delighted to tell you about them."

"But this will take a long time," objected Rutland. "I am afraid I shall be a great nuisance to you."

"Oh, nonsense! Father Rizzio has placed my services at your disposal, and I shall be delighted to go with you. Will you see Father Rizzio in the morning?"

"Yes, I shall be delighted."

"Good. I will call here at ten o'clock then."

When Father Matthew was gone Rutland thought of what had been said. Once he wondered whether Father Ritzoom had some secret purpose in making such arrangements for him; but he dispelled the suspicion as unworthy. Besides, what room had he to doubt? He had come to see Rome, and to see it through the eyes of those who understood its divine meanings. What better opportunity could he have than that presented by the young Jesuit? It was more than he had ever hoped for, and he felt grateful to Father Ritzoom for his great kindness. After all, he had greatly misjudged these Catholics. Although he had been their greatest enemy in Lynford, they had forgiven him freely, and had heaped kindnesses upon him. He thought of Alizon too. He had not seen her for months, never, in fact, since September, and it was now the beginning of February, but his love for her had seemed to grow stronger every day. He had every reason to think well of those belonging to her faith, for was not she the embodiment of womanly beauty and purity? was not she the one woman in the world to him?

During the next week he saw little of Rome from the outside; instead, he accompanied Father Matthew to the dwelling places of those who were the moving forces in the Catholic world. After he had made a few visits he was simply staggered at what he saw. Of Rome as a city he knew next to nothing, but of Rome as a great centre of enterprise and religious activity he learnt much. After all, it was no wonder that these Catholics were proud of their history. Father Rizzio described to him the work of the Jesuits in the mission field, how ever since the days of Ignatius, they had gone from land to land, establishing the Church everywhere. He told him of their schemes for spreading the faith in heathen lands, of the progress they were making, and of the length of time he expected it would take to dethrone heathenism, and enthrone Christianity in those regions they had marked out as peculiarly their own. After he had spent some hours with Father Rizzio, he was introduced to the General of the Order of St. Dominic. The stern strength of the founder of this great army was revealed to him, and how, in days of lethargy and darkness, he established a great order of preachers. He was told how they had swept across vast districts like a mighty avalanche, and how everywhere the Dominican monks had planted the standard of the Cross. The General, who was a man of great personality, told him of his present plans, and related how the monks of St. Dominic were going into the darkest regions of the earth, in order to destroy heathendom. Vast as was the organisation he seemed to know every detail of its working, and was cognisant of every scheme for the advancement of the Church. Both among the Jesuits and the Dominicans there seemed a perfect plan of action. No army ready for battle could have a more clearly defined plan of campaign, no regiment could be more perfectly disciplined than were the priests.

The same was true in relation to the Franciscans, only they appealed to him in a different way. Like the Jesuits and Dominicans, the Franciscans had taken the Vow of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, but they seemed to regard it more strictly. Rutland had always been a great admirer of St. Francis, and had spent many hours in poring over the history of his career. The way in which he and his followers had gained such ascendancy in the Western Church had seemed to the young minister as little short of miraculous, and so it was with a feeling akin to awe that he spoke to the representative of an Order which had existed for seven hundred years. He noted, too, the extreme simplicity of the life of the monks, and listened with wonder as he was told of the hardships they endured. St. Francis had conceived in the far back past that the essence of Christianity lay in poverty, and through the centuries the monks had carried out their founder's ideals. It is true he remembered the strife which had existed between the Franciscans and the Dominicans, but this seemed but as nothing as he talked with the General of the Order. He was for the time so much impressed by the spirit of St. Francis that he forgot those things which the critic of the Order would naturally advance. He saw these men going out, like the apostles of old, "having nothing, yet possessing all things," taking with them neither scrip nor purse, trusting in God for their daily bread, and everywhere proclaiming the good news of God. He saw, too, something of the greatness of their ideals, and of their plans of winning the world to the Church.

He also saw the heads of the Orders of the Trappists, the Benedictines, the Passionists; he had a conversation with the Mother Superior of the Poor Clares, those sisters who went everywhere on their errands of mercy; in short,

he saw the great societies of the Church in their spiritual aspect, and for a time he was stunned. Never had he dreamed of such perfect organisation, never had he thought of such far-reaching efforts to establish the Catholic Church.

"Of course, you have seen but a very little," said Father Matthew to him, "but enough to form some idea of what is represented here at Rome. Enough, too, to prepare your mind to visit some of the churches. I think now, after looking through two or three of the principal colleges, we had better attend the Church of St. John's Lateran, where an ordination service takes place in a few days."

"Very well," said Rutland. "I shall be delighted."

"Have you been pleased with what you have seen?"

"Oh yes, it is very wonderful. Your Church has some tremendous organisations."

"Yes, but in reality they are all one. Of course, it is natural that our enterprises should appear colossal to you. A Church which has existed for nearly nineteen centuries, and has spread all over the world, cannot be easily understood."

"No, it cannot. But I have been greatly interested. I should never have seen these things but for you."

"I am glad to have been of service to you; but I ought to tell you that for the next two days I shall be engaged. To-morrow is Sunday, and I have much to do. On Monday I have to go to Frascati, but after that I shall be able to accompany you again."

"All right," said Duncan. "To be frank, I shall be glad of a little rest. During the fortnight we have been together I have seen what I never dreamed of, and Rome has become a new city."

"I daresay it has," replied the priest. "The truth is the ordinary visitor to Rome sees practically nothing, because he understands nothing. He goes around with a guide-

book in his hand, and stares at the churches and the monuments, he reads certain commonplaces, and then fancies he has 'done' Rome. Of the real inwardness of the place he knows just as much as he knew before he came. Of course, you have only had a glimpse of the inner life of the Church. You have seen, in bare outline, something of our scope and purpose. You have heard explanations of what has been done, and what is being done, and can now faintly get an idea of the vast army of priests who are engaged in winning the world to the subjection of the Holy Father. Presently you will understand more; because you will see, as far as Rome can show you, how our ideals will be translated into facts."

The young priest spoke with the utmost assurance, he had no apparent doubt of final victory, and Rutland, who was under the spell of the men with whom during the past fortnight he had been conversing, was influenced by his words. Up to the present he had not given much time to studying what he had been told. He had been simply listening, and storing up in his memory the words he had heard.

They were standing on the steps of St. Peter's as they spoke, while Rutland's eyes were traversing the windows of the Vatican.

"It's a wonderful building, isn't it?" said Father Matthew, noting his attitude. "Look! that is the window of the Holy Father's apartments, the third from the end there."

"I suppose so," said Rutland. "It is a wondrous place; but only a prison after all."

"Yes, of course, the Pope is a prisoner, although a voluntary one. But that will all be changed. Leo XIII. may not live to see it; but his successor will. In God's time, all Italy will come back to subjection to the Vatican,

ay, and so will England and Germany, and the rest of the Protestant nations."

"You think so?"

"There can be no doubt about it."

Rutland could not help smiling.

"Ah, you will see by and by. But I must be going now. On Tuesday I will see you again."

The time was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and Rutland started to walk towards his hotel in the Via del Babuino. He made his way across the Piazza St. Pietro, and then, noting a restaurant, stopped for a cup of tea. After the waiter had brought it, he sat for a long time looking at the great church, and watched it as it stood out boldly against the glow of the western sky. St. Peter's stands on the outskirts of the city, and from no part of Rome can it be seen in the light of the rising sun. If one wishes to see this magnificent pile at its best, one must watch it as the day is dying. It was in this light that Rutland saw it on that bright February evening. All around men were working, digging up the grass which grew between the paving-stones, while the shadow cast by the great dome grew darker and darker. Little by little the square became empty. One by one the visitors entered the conveyances, and rode away, and still the young man looked.

"Everything tells of what has been," thought Rutland; "everything seems dying, nothing pulsates with the breath of a new life. All these grass-grown pavements, and all these sleepy-looking priests speak of what has been—nothing tells of a future. Yonder old man, who lives behind those windows, seems a kind of symbol of the faith he represents. It is old, decaying. There is majesty, but it is the majesty of age, and not of new-born life. Now I come to think of it, the Generals of those Orders did not represent young

life, but simply a vast machinery. There is no youth in it at all. Everything is so old, so very old. There is the same adherence to rule everywhere. Nothing is the outburst of new ideas, new impulses. They are all old men too. Strong they are, but none of them seem to possess the strength of youth. Everything is cold, calculating. Every man works according to a well-worn plan. Nothing is done without precedent. It seems a huge machinery, this Roman Catholic Church, and the machinery is nowhere managed by young men. But I must see more before I draw conclusions."

The evening grew cold, and he started to walk again. There was plenty of time for him to get back and dress for dinner, so he did not hurry. He made his way across the Tiber, by one of the many bridges by which it is spanned, resisting the appeals of the shop-keepers, who begged him to buy ornaments, asking nearly double the price they expected to get, until he reached Via di Ripetta, and finally, the Piazza del Popolo. For a moment he stood looking at the busy life of the Corso, and then found his way to his hotel.

"It is rather lonely at the hotel," thought the young man, "I scarcely know any one yet, and I am afraid the next day or two will hang rather heavily. Still, I am glad of the rest, for this last fortnight I seem to have been working very hard. To-morrow morning, however, I'll go to high Mass at St. Peter's, and in the afternoon I will——"

The porter opened the door of the hotel to him, and then he started back in astonishment, while the blood rushed madly to his face. Standing before him with outstretched hand was Alizon Neville.

CHAPTER XXI

WHAT ALIZON AND DUNCAN SAW AT ST. PETER'S

"YOU seem surprised to see me," said the girl with a laugh.

"I am, indeed," he replied. "I had no idea that you thought of coming here."

"No! Well, everything has been very sudden. It is less than a week ago since mother decided to come. The truth is she has not been very well, and as winter does not come to an end in Lancashire till the end of April, the doctor ordered her south. She has not been to Rome for many years, while I had never been at all, so she decided that we should come here. Of course, you can imagine how delighted I am to come and see this, the great centre of our faith."

"Oh yes," replied Rutland, "and I am gladder than words can say to see you here. I hope her ladyship is better."

"Yes, she is better, but is still far from strong. The doctor advised Italy, while Father Ritzoom, who has been staying at the Priory, persuaded her to come to Rome. He says it is one of the healthiest cities in the world."

"I should judge that he is right," said Rutland. "Of course before the Italian government took possession, Rome

was a fever-trap, but now it is wonderfully clean and health-giving."

"And are you better?" asked Alizon kindly.

"Oh yes, I am better."

"It seems such a long time since I saw you. Why, it was last September when we last met, nearly six months ago."

"Yes, it is a long time. It seems six years."

"Does it? And you have been very ill too. I—I was very anxious about you. We often made inquiries."

"You are very kind," replied the young man.

"We heard once that you were dead," said the girl, "and—and mother immediately sent a special messenger to your lodgings. I—I was so relieved to know that the report was false."

"Thank you," replied Rutland. "I suppose at one time the doctor thought I had breathed my last. But there—it's not worth talking about now. I am worth a host of dead men. I'm not going to die yet."

"But what was the cause of such a serious illness?" asked Alizon. She seemed excited, and there was a tremor in her voice.

"The doctor said it was overwork and worry that brought on the brain fever," replied Rutland, gazing steadfastly into her face.

The girl's eyes dropped. "I—I am so glad you are better," she said.

"Thank you; I hope I shall see much of you," he added hesitatingly, "but there is the first bell, I must go and dress for dinner."

When Rutland entered the dining-room, he saw Lady Neville sitting at one of the small tables near a window.

"This table is big enough for three," said her ladyship. "I hope you will sit with us. I don't like those long

tables, and yet I don't care about dining in my rooms, so I arranged for us to be together, if you are agreeable."

The young man's heart beat fast with delight. Rome had ceased to be merely the centre of the Papacy, and one of the most wonderful cities in the world—it was a veritable Paradise, and at that moment his wildest dreams seemed possible.

During dinner Lady Neville proved a delightful companion. She related some of her former experiences in Rome, how as a girl she had an audience with Pope Pius IX., what he had said to her, and how he had impressed her.

"I was here on my honeymoon with Sir Charles," she said gaily, "so naturally everything appeared in the brightest of colours. Besides, the Holy Father was very kind; so were some of the Cardinals. At that time there was a great movement towards Rome. As you know, Newman and Manning brought a troop of converts with them, and it appeared as though the whole country was coming to bow the knee to the Holy Father. It seemed to atone for the loss of Imperial power in the State."

"But Rome has changed since then," suggested Rutland.

"I suppose it has, doubtless it has. But tell me what you have been doing here. Father Ritzoom told me he had written to Father Rizzio asking him to render you any service in his power. I hope he has done so."

Thereupon Rutland told her what he had seen. How he had been led from the head of one organisation to another, and how he had been astounded at the vast magnitude of the machinery of the Church.

"And were these men interesting?" asked her ladyship, her eyes beaming with pleasure and satisfaction.

Thereupon Rutland spoke of the services which had been rendered him in no sparing terms. He extolled

very highly the learning and intellectual power of the men with whom he had been brought into contact.

"The Church occupies a different position here from what it does in England," said her ladyship.

"Yes, in a sense it is almighty," replied Rutland. "The wealth of the world has been poured into this city. Everything astounds one."

"I am so glad you came here," she replied. "Father Ritzoom feared it might give you a wrong impression, and——" She hesitated a second as though she had said more than she had intended. "You see," she went on, "Rome is not like other cities. It cannot be understood from the outside. It is like a church window. You cannot see its beauty from the exterior, you must go inside, and look out towards the light."

"I think I understand, Lady Neville," he replied, but he did not understand at all.

"I am afraid I am not well enough to take much exercise while I am here," said her ladyship. "The doctor has ordered me perfect rest; but I am anxious that Alizon shall see everything. You say that Father Matthew is accompanying you?"

"Yes," he replied, "and—and," he stammered almost painfully, "if Miss Alizon can accompany us—I—I shall be delighted."

"That will be capital," responded her ladyship.

"To-morrow and Monday Father Matthew will be engaged," went on Rutland, "and I had decided to wander around by myself. To-morrow morning I thought of going to high Mass at St. Peter's."

"Oh, mother, I should like to go," said Alizon eagerly.

"Well, why not?" responded her ladyship, "that is if Mr. Rutland will encumber himself with you."

They sat talking during dinner, and then Lady Neville

invited him to her private drawing-room, where they passed the evening most pleasantly.

On the following morning the two started for St. Peter's. They had allowed themselves plenty of time, and so were able to walk quietly. The sky was clear and bright, the air was crisp and exhilarating. When they reached the Piazza del Popolo the morning sunlight fairly flooded the square, while up above them in the gardens of the Pincio the evergreens glinted in the light of the bright sun.

"This is lovely," cried the young man. "I never dreamed of such happiness yesterday."

"I am awfully excited," said the girl. "I have often dreamed of being in Rome on a Sunday, and longed to attend high Mass at St. Peter's. Haven't you?"

"No, I cannot say that I have," replied Rutland.

"Oh, I forgot! I do pity you, Mr. Rutland!"

"I pity myself," responded the young man. "This is the Corso," he continued, as they walked down the long thoroughfare. "This afternoon, indeed, on all afternoons, it is crowded with carriages. So is the Pincio above. Yonder is the house which Dumas had in his mind when he described Monte Cristo watching the carnival," and he went on pointing out objects of interest as they went down the thoroughfare.

On their way they passed a group of Italian priests. They were dirty, unshaven, unkempt, greasy and disreputable to a man.

"What horrid-looking men!" said the girl involuntarily.

"Yes, they do not look attractive."

"And what terrible faces they have!"

"Yes, they do not seem desirable acquaintances."

"But what are they doing here in Rome?"

"Oh, the city attracts them, I suppose! I am told that there are many hundreds of these plebeian clergy in Rome

who hang around in the hope that they can get a couple of francs for saying a mass."

"But are they not attached to some Church?"

"I suppose not. They are mendicants. I am told that many of them spend much of their time at wine-shops in the poorer parts of the town. Anyhow, the city is full of them. There are cassocks of all colours here, and most of those worn by the lower order of priests are ragged and dirty."

The girl seemed about to say more, but she checked herself, and remained silent.

Just before they reached the Piazza Colonna, Rutland pointed to a building just discernible from the Corso.

"That is the General Post Office," he said; "close by is the Church for English Catholics—the Church of San Silvestro. It is said to have contained the head of John the Baptist for about one thousand years."

"Indeed! How interesting!" but Alizon spoke coldly, as though she were thinking of something else.

Presently they turned in the direction of St. Peter's, and a little later crossed one of the bridges which spanned the swift-moving waters of the Tiber.

"It is a fine river," said the girl; "the stone embankments look new."

"They are. They have been built since Rome was taken from the Church."

"And before that?"

"Very little was done to it, and its banks were the home of disease."

Again Alizon was silent; but presently broke into a cry of delight, for St. Peter's stood before them.

"Isn't it grand, glorious?" she cried enthusiastically.

"It is indeed," replied Rutland. "It is simply a marvel." As they walked across the square outside the Vatican

buildings, Alizon spoke never a word. She seemed entranced at the sight of the great building. The figures of Christ and His Apostles standing on the great front of the church, looking solemnly across the city, filled her mind with many thoughts; the ground on which she walked was to her holy.

When they came to the massive bronze doors, which were opened only on great occasions, she felt a shiver pass through her frame, then she followed Rutland to a smaller entrance, where a dirty Italian lifted a heavy pad which hung across the doorway, and then held out his cap for alms.

"Starving beggars on the steps of St. Peter's," she murmured as she passed in.

Such thoughts were dispelled, however, when she stood beneath the roof of the most renowned church in Christendom. She saw at a glance that untold wealth had been poured here. Statues, pillars, decorations, all represented incalculable riches.

Duncan made his way towards the Gregorian Chapel, where high Mass was being celebrated. It is only a small building, capable of holding perhaps two or three hundred people. Very little accommodation was allowed for worshippers, however. A few forms were placed, calculated to seat forty or fifty people, but beyond that, nothing. About a hundred and fifty people were gathered, nearly all of whom were standing. At each end of the chapel sat a number of priests chanting. There were eighty in all, forty at each end of the building, who sat in the stalls provided. But few worshippers appeared to be present—nearly all were spectators. Both Alizon and Duncan noted that all the priests belonged to the higher order of clergy. Bishops, Canons, Monsignori, and other dignitaries participated in the service. All of them wore magnificent robes.

Alizon looked around for a place whereon to kneel, but noticing that all remained standing and looked towards the clergy, she did likewise. Presently she found herself studying their faces. She remembered that all of them belonged to the aristocratic portion of the clergy, some were even princes of the Church, and yet she failed to be awed. There was scarcely a fine face among them. Most of the priests were fat, corpulent men. As she watched she saw them yawning while they chanted the words from the books they held, as though they were weary, and longed for the ceremony to come to an end. A cold, disappointing feeling came into her heart. She expected to be awed by this service, she had dreamed of kneeling down on the floor of St. Peter's, while a great hush filled the hearts of the multitude. Here, however, all was different. There was no reverent atmosphere pervading the place. Presently a feeling of indignation came into her heart; for while the officiating priest stood on the altar, and was handling the sacred elements, she saw that the crowd of clergy who sat in the stalls, were taking their snuff-boxes from beneath their garments, and deliberately using snuff in the presence of the amused spectators. Involuntarily she looked towards Rutland and noticed a smile playing around his lips, a smile partly of amusement, partly of derision.

She continued to watch, however. She had intended to fall on her knees at the elevation of the host, but even while the officiating priest was engaged in what she believed to be the most sacred part of his duty, the changing of the elements into the very blood and body of Christ, she saw these prelates of the Church whispering to each other, yawning, and deliberately taking snuff. At that moment she felt some one tugging at her skirts, and looking down, she saw a poor Italian woman on her knees, who was trying to make her two children kneel likewise. It was in doing

this that she had accidentally pulled Alizon's dress. The sight of the woman aroused in her a sense of duty, and so she knelt down, and tried to think the thoughts appropriate to the solemn occasion. But it was impossible. As she read the book before her, she thought of those dignitaries of the Church, there within the very walls of St. Peter's, yawning and indulging in a habit which she despised, even while they believed that the very body and blood of Christ were elevated in their midst. She did not condemn the habit so much in private life, but that they should indulge in it within those sacred walls, on such an occasion, seemed to the English girl the veriest sacrilege.

Presently the service came to an end, and she had to move nearer Rutland, while a dozen or more priests entered, followed by boys. Then a procession was formed. The officiating priest carried a receptacle containing the sacred elements, over this was placed a canopy borne by four men, while others bore candles, and thus they paraded around the building. She had enjoyed these processions in England, they had seemed to her picturesque and stately, but here everything seemed mechanical, unreal. All was so different from what she expected.

"What does Mr. Rutland think of it, I wonder?" she asked herself, but she did not ask him; somehow a weight seemed on her tongue.

Presently they found themselves wandering around the edifice. Many hundreds of people were within its walls, but it appeared almost empty.

"Is it not stupendous?" said Rutland.

"Yes, it is immense," she replied quietly; "but I think I like smaller churches best."

They looked at the faultless carvings which decorated the walls, they examined the figures of saints and heroes which surrounded them in wondrous profusion. Both of them

noticed, moreover, although neither mentioned it, that most of the carvings were Pagan in conception, that here in St. Peter's the heathen ideas of the Leo who did much to erect the stupendous pile, dominated the gorgeous decorations. Everything was immense, almost overwhelming; the wealth of the nations had been poured here like water, but the feeling of reverence, of awe, which Alizon longed for, did not enter her heart.

"I suppose St. Peter was crucified here," she said presently.

"Opinion seems divided," replied Rutland. "Some say it was under the dome here; others think it was outside the walls in Nero's gardens. Nothing is known. But look, there is his statue yonder."

They walked towards the bronze statue of St. Peter, which strangely reminded Rutland of one of the old Roman deities. The figure of more than life size was seated on a chair, and around its head a bronze nimbus was fixed. The right foot was extended, and the big toe, bronze though it was, was made smooth by the kisses of the faithful.

"Is this supposed to be like St. Peter?" asked Alizon.

"It is said so," replied Rutland. "I wonder whether he ever dreamed of his statue being placed on a pedestal while the crowds came to kiss his toe?"

A laugh came to the girl's lips, she could not help it; but she checked it instantly. Such mirth was surely a sin.

Two Italian artisans came up, took out their handkerchiefs, wiped the toe, kissed it and passed on. Then some women came and followed the example of the men. While they waited, some thirty or forty people kissed the foot of the bronze figure. Some crossed themselves. But all wiped the toe, some with the sleeves of their coats, some with their handkerchiefs, and all kissed it. Many beslavered it with

kisses, and rubbed their foreheads against it as though it could impart a blessing.

They noticed that both the handkerchiefs and the coat sleeves were far from clean, and Alizon, Catholic though she was, felt no desire to kiss the lifeless thing before her.

They continued to wander around the church. At many of the chapels a priest was saying a mass, before some of the altars a solitary man or woman was kneeling, while the smell of incense pervaded every part of the great building.

"We must come here many times before we can realise its wonders," said Rutland presently. "Some of the most marvellous works of genius in the world are here. They cannot be seen in one visit."

"Must we?" said the girl; "but let us go out now. It is very cold. I want to feel the warm sun."

They left the church standing in all its cold but gorgeous grandeur. In after days they understood it better; then, however, it seemed only a stupendous mausoleum, the grave of the ideals of past centuries.

Outside, under the very shadow of the Pope's apartments, and in spite of the efforts of the secular government, the beggars gathered and clamoured.

"You see those windows there at the left?" said Rutland, pointing to the Vatican buildings.

"Yes."

"The third from the end belongs to the Pope's private apartment."

"Indeed."

"Report has it that he often stands there at night-time, and looks out over the city, grieving at its loss, and dreaming of a time when he will not only reign over Rome again, but over all the world."

"And do you think he ever will?"

"No, he never will," replied the young man quietly.

She seemed about to reply, but somehow the words died on her lips. Why she could not tell.

"What do you think of the church and the service?" asked Rutland presently.

"St. Peter's is terribly imposing," she replied, "only——"

"Only what?"

"I do not know why, but—but it feels like a gorgeous vault."

"Do you feel like that too?" asked Rutland.

"Oh, do not mistake me," said the girl impulsively. "It is all very grand. Such a church ought to be. When I have gone again and again I shall understand it better. But I have never been in Rome before, and I seem to be stunned."

"Yes, I can quite understand you."

They walked quietly back to the hotel, scarcely speaking a word. They took a circuitous route, passing the Pantheon and the Piazza Venezia on their way, Alizon constantly looking around with an expression of bewilderment on her face.

"It's wonderfully grand," she said presently.

"That is the word," replied Rutland.

"It will take me a few days to get accustomed to it all. At present I am sure I do not see things as they ought to be seen," and she sighed as though she were disappointed.

Presently they came to the Piazza di Spagna, which was glittering in the sunlight, and where flower-sellers had brought their beauteous wares. Bright-eyed Italian girls followed them, beseeching them to buy, using all the English words they knew.

"I like this part of Rome best," cried Alizon, "it seems more like home."

"But not like home on a Sunday," suggested Rutland.

When they reached the hotel Lady Neville met them with news which set Rutland's heart beating. And yet he could not tell why it moved him so.

CHAPTER XXII

THE OPINIONS OF THOSE IN HIGH PLACES

THE news which Lady Neville communicated to Alizon and Rutland was to the effect that Monsignor Lindley and the Bishop of Tolisco had consented to dine with her on the following evening, and that she hoped Rutland would also accept her hospitality. Duncan accepted at once. For one thing, he was still under Alizon's spell, and was glad of any excuse to be in her company, while for another, he wanted to converse with these Church prelates. Hitherto he had conversed only with the generals of various Orders, the heads of great missionary organisations, and the presidents of colleges. These men, while fully informed concerning their own particular departments of work, were utterly ignorant of the thoughts and feelings of the common people who thronged all around them. Some of them seemed to know a great deal of the life of India, and of the South Sea Islands, but they knew nothing of the government, municipal and Imperial, of Italy. Indeed, the Catholic priest is not generally a well-informed man. His sympathies are insular, and his knowledge is generally limited to his own department of work. Rutland hoped, therefore, that in meeting with Monsignor Lindley and the Bishop of Tolisco he should be able to learn something of the secular side of the Church-work in Italy. He had

learnt that vast changes had taken place in Rome since 1870, and he wanted to know how these Church dignitaries regarded these changes. Lady Neville's invitation gave him the opportunity he desired, and he looked forward with much eagerness towards the next evening.

After lunch the young man went on to the Pincian Gardens alone, while Alizon sat with her mother.

"I have great hopes of to-morrow night," said her ladyship. "Indeed, I made the arrangement partly for Mr. Rutland's benefit."

Alizon was silent.

"You see," Lady Neville continued, "Mr. Rutland's Protestant prejudices were stronger than we had imagined. Even Father Ritzoom admitted this when he visited us at the Priory a few weeks ago. As you know, it was through his wish that we decided to stay in Rome rather than in Cannes or Nice, or Monte Carlo. He builds a great deal on his conversion, and believes that when it takes place it will begin a movement which will affect the whole district of Lynford. The seeds of truth have been sown, and we must do all in our power to see that they bring forth fruit."

Alizon still continued silent. For the first time in her life she had a secret from her mother. Up to the present she had not told her of Rutland's confession, and while she longed to take her into her confidence, something forbade her doing so. On several occasions she had opened her lips to speak, but a weight had seemed to be placed on them, and she had said nothing. Sometimes she was afraid she was not acting quite honourably, and still she continued to hide her secret in her heart, and to brood over it in silence. Moreover, the fact that Rutland loved her became more and more pleasant. She was sure that she could never think of returning the love while he remained a heretic, nevertheless she was glad he loved her. During his illness, it was at her

instigation that constant inquiries were sent from the Priory concerning his welfare, and no one knew of the sleepless hours she had spent while the young minister lay close to the portals of death.

When Lady Neville had expressed the desire to go to Rome, Alizon had gladly consented, and now that she was in the Eternal City, its interest was increased to her because Rutland stayed at the same hotel.

"Are Monsignor Lindley and the Bishop of Tolisco clever men?" she asked presently.

"They are among the ablest men in Rome," was the reply, "and I am sure they will have a very beneficial influence upon our young friend."

"Do you think he will ever be converted, mother?"

"Oh, I have no doubt, now! I am practically certain that his illness was caused by studying the differences between the Catholic and the Protestant faith, and the mental anxiety which such a study entailed. In his delirium he often talked about the unity of our Church, and such like matters."

"Is it fair to retail such things?" asked the girl rather indignantly.

"It was common talk," remarked her ladyship. "It is true he said nothing during his unconscious hours that could be fastened upon, but there is little doubt that his illness was owing to his great anxiety concerning religion."

Alizon heaved a sigh of relief. She had often wondered whether he had at any time mentioned her name during his fever-stricken days, and had longed to inquire. But she had reflected that in a town like Lynford, where all kinds of gossip was eagerly fastened upon, had he spoken of her she would certainly have heard of it. She felt sure, moreover, that she knew more concerning the real cause of his illness than any one else, and because of it she had often prayed

for his recovery. She did not feel any love for him, but if he had died she was sure that his love for her would have been the main cause of his death.

"The fact of his coming to Rome shows the drift of his mind," added her ladyship.

"Yes," said Alizon, remembering the conversation they had had together as they walked through the woods near the Priory.

"And so, for his own sake, and for the sake of our faith, we must do what we can that the good seed may bear fruit," continued Lady Neville. "I verily believe it would mean a new Reformation in Lynford. Was he impressed with the service at St. Peter's this morning?"

"Yes, he was much impressed," replied Alizon, keeping her eyes on the floor.

"Of course, many doubts will naturally remain in his mind, but these, I hope, will be dispelled to-morrow night."

"Does Monsignor Lindley and the Bishop of Tolisco know—that is, are they aware of—how matters stand?" stammered Alizon.

"Nothing in particular. I simply spoke of him as a possible convert."

Rutland saw neither Lady Neville nor Alizon any more that day, and during the whole of Monday Alizon remained with her mother, so that when night drew near the young man's heart beat rapidly at the thought of meeting her at dinner.

About seven o'clock Duncan met Alizon in one of the corridors.

"I was just wondering about you," she said kindly. "Mother expected you an hour ago. Both our other guests have arrived. Are you ready to come? I see you have dressed for dinner."

"Yes," replied Duncan. "If I adopted clerical attire it

would save me much trouble ; but being somewhat of a radical in that direction, I have to go through the ordeal of dressing for dinner every night."

They walked along the corridor together till they came to Lady Neville's apartments, and immediately afterwards Rutland was introduced to the two Roman dignitaries.

Monsignor Lindley was a tall, corpulent man, fair of face, and florid. His features were of Irish cast, and he still retained, although he had lived thirty years in Italy, a slight Irish accent. He was a man of great influence in Rome, and occupied positions of trust in several of the important organisations peculiar to the Papacy. He spoke with apparent frankness, and impressed Rutland with his *bonhomie* demeanour. Dr. Rizzoni, the Bishop of Tolisco, presented a marked contrast to his companion. He was a little man, and looked almost shrivelled as he stood by Monsignor Lindley's side. His skin was dark and like parchment. His mouth was somewhat sunken, his nose was large, his brows were overhanging, making his eyes, which were really large, appear small. Nevertheless, it was the man's eyes which really impressed one. They were coal-black, and had a quick, restless movement. He spoke English, but not fluently, he often hesitated for a word, and seemed impatient because he could not express his thoughts easily. Dr. Rizzoni was a member of the Congregation of the Index, and was especially severe on any cleric who should give expression to thoughts which in the slightest degree suggested liberality. He was the deadly enemy of the new movement in America, called Americanism, and fought with great vehemence against any modification either in the doctrine or ritual of the Church. Moreover, he hated the Italian Government with a deadly hatred. He held that Mazzini was a blaspheming atheist, an enemy to God and man ; while Garibaldi was a bloodthirsty cut-

throat who deserved and undoubtedly suffered the torments of the lost. It was said, moreover, that he would not pay the slightest homage to the king, regarding him as a usurper, living in a house which rightfully belonged to the Pope. Possibly Monsignor Lindley was as ardent a Catholic as Dr. Rizzoni, but he expressed himself more pleasantly, laughed more heartily, and was not averse to the good things of this life. The Irishman was a man of the people; but Dr. Rizzoni came from an old Italian family, and held to the aristocratic ideas of the country.

Both greeted Rutland kindly; Monsignor Lindley shook his hand with great heartiness, while the other watched him furtively. Both seemed to expect that the young man would pay them some homage, and were evidently surprised at his greeting them as one man is in the habit of greeting another in England. They sat down to dinner without speaking.

While the waiters hovered around them the conversation was general, but when they had gone, and cigars and coffee had been brought, they spoke freely on subjects near their hearts. Dr. Rizzoni did not smoke; instead, he helped himself liberally from his snuff-box, and seemed to enjoy himself thoroughly. Presently, moreover, both seemed to forget that Rutland was a Protestant, and spoke without reserve on Church questions, especially on that which went by the name of Americanism.

"Of course," Monsignor Lindley remarked, "this American question is a difficult one. It is a new country, and the people are imbued with new ideas. We must not forget, moreover, that there is a tremendous leakage in that country. Had all the emigrants to America remained true to the faith we should have thirty millions of adherents instead of nine millions. That is a sad state of things, and I trust the Holy Father will look at the question from a liberal standpoint."

"It must not be," said the other, "it must not be. Every concession ends in calamity. Directly the Church deviates one hair's breadth from the lines she has marked out, she lessens her power. The Church knows nothing of countries. Her laws are eternal. I hope the Holy Father will remain firm."

"But still there have been periods when she would have acted wisely if she had considered national prejudices," said the Irishman.

"Pardon me, I do not think so. The Church is Divine, and because it is Divine it is unchangeable. America must be governed entirely from Rome, even as the rest of the Church must be."

"And yet see what we have lost by being unyielding," replied Monsignor Lindley. "Think of Italy."

"Italy will learn wisdom in time," was the other's response. "There have been many periods in the history of the world when the Church has lost power, but God has raised up a man who has destroyed error and the results of evil counsel. Think of the condition of the Church before the coming of Hildebrand. And yet during his Pontificate he changed the thought and life of Christendom. I pray God that when Leo XIII. dies another such a man may rise—one who shall rule with a strong hand, and teach the heretic nations the laws of God. I tell you we must have no compromise."

"Do you think Cardinal Vampasia would meet your wishes?"

"Too much sympathy with the French," was the reply. "The Spaniards and the Austrians would veto him immediately. Besides, he has so-called liberal ideas, and they are of the devil."

"Then what do you think of Lostella?"

"Weak, weak. He plays with the king. A time-server

too. He has no policy, no clear, definite ideas of the work of the Church."

"Then what do you say of Fowver?"

"A Frenchman, and no Frenchman must be Pope. The Papal chair belongs to an Italian. I shall do my utmost to fight against such."

"For my own part, I favour Lostella," cried Monsignor Lindley, "and shall do my utmost for him."

"No, no," cried Dr. Rizzoni, "it will not do. He pretends to be liberal, favours education, and speaks of the power of knowledge. See what education has done for Italy."

"But is not the condition of Italy the result of the policy of the Church in the past?"

"No, no," cried Dr. Rizzoni impatiently. "The mad rampant atheism of Italy is partly the result of that foul and atheistic education of the people. It is the outcome, too, of the devil incarnate in the shape of Freemasonry. From the time when Voltaire began to pour out blasphemy under the guise of a plea for education, knowledge among the people has only meant unbelief, discontent, disobedience, anarchy. The Church has always known best how to treat the common people. It has taught them to obey the Church, and that is enough for them to learn."

Perhaps Lady Neville had scarcely furthered her purposes in bringing these two men together. Report had it that Monsignor Lindley's professed liberalism was to Rizzoni like the proverbial red rag to a bull. It is possible, too, that although neither had taken but a moderate quantity of wine during dinner, they had just drunk enough to unloose their tongues. Rutland, who never took wine, listened with keen interest, but with a cool head. Alizon followed the conversation with intense eagerness; Lady Neville looked rather uncomfortable.

"Is atheism so very strong in Italy?" asked Rutland.

"Strong, strong?" cried Rizzoni. "The country is riddled with it. The Italian Parliament is atheistic, the press is atheistic; indeed, the secular life of the nation is bitterly antagonistic to the Church. If an atheistic paper criticises the Church it is quoted in Parliament, if a Church paper criticises the Government it is suppressed. The State robs us, throws stones at us, harms us all it can."

"But how has this bitter antagonism been aroused?" asked Rutland. "In Italy the Church has had Imperial as well as spiritual dominion. How has religion lost ground to such an extent?"

"Godless education," cried Rizzoni. "It began in France, and the wave reached us. Worldly knowledge made Italians proud. Italians wanted to form a great nation. Then Mazzini, Garibaldi, Cavour, and the rest of them fed the childish vanity of the people, and led them to oppose the will of the Church. The bloodhounds of lies were unloosed, open rebellion against the Holy Father became the order of the day, and truth was left to lie bleeding on the ground."

"But truth is stronger than lies," suggested Rutland.

"Eventually it will be," cried Rizzoni. "Only there must be no tampering with it. The Church must not yield an inch in her demands—not an inch. She is the voice of God, and must have absolute dominion. All this playing with the secular government, all this hobnobbing with worldly power is of the devil. Italy belongs to the Church, to rule as she thinks fit, and the Church must act accordingly."

"But can you resist education?" cried Rutland. "Is not knowledge the heritage of the people?"

"What does it do for the people? The truth is, men of the world fail to distinguish between true and false prosperity."

You will doubtless say that knowledge leads to commercial greatness ; I say that commercial greatness is nothing when compared with the advancement of religion. What is wanted to save the world is not knowledge, not wealth ; it is faith and obedience."

"But what if reason rejects faith?" asked Rutland.

"Religion does not depend on reason," cried the old man. "Religion belongs to another realm of life. The matter is absolutely plain. Here is the Church, the will of God on earth, established by Christ Himself. He gave the keys to St. Peter and his successors for ever. Men must not reason with God. The Church demands faith and obedience, and nothing else will satisfy her. Reason has no right to advance her claim if it touches even the outskirts of the Citadel of St. Peter. The reason of the world has meant rebellion—always meant it. It was so back in the time of Arius ; it was true of Huss, and of that Antichrist, Luther. It was true of Calvin, of Knox, and all the rest of them. No, no ; the Church knows what is best ; and it is the duty of all Christians to believe and obey the Church without hesitation."

"Still the Church is ever kind to her wandering children," said Monsignor Lindley. "It offers them a gracious welcome."

"Yes, but they must come back humbly penitent," said the old Bishop. "They must promise implicit obedience, they must denounce all error whatsoever."

"Then you contend that the Church is absolute truth : that it represents the will of God?" said Rutland.

"Doubtless."

"But can men find truth except through reason? Is not reason the medium through which God teaches His children?"

"Not unless that reason is in entire subjection to God

and to the Church. The Church must be, is in reality, all powerful."

"And yet you say Italy is leaving you; that every section of its life is riddled with atheism. In Protestant England aggressive atheism is dead."

"That fact is a mere bubble on the wave. We have nothing to do with success or failure. We simply stand by the Church of God. By and by she will have her power back, by and by she will not only rule over two or three states in Italy, but over the whole country."

"And when her power does come back," asked Rutland, "what will you do then? How will you treat atheism and heresy?"

"Deal with it?" said the old Italian, whose eyes flashed fire; "it will be put down with a strong hand."

Rutland ceased asking questions, but he listened to the conversation which continued mainly between the two priests. He followed the arguments expressive of the semi-liberalism of the Irishman with interest, and his heart grew hard at the stern ultramontaniam of the Italian. Monsignor Lindley, aided by Lady Neville, presented the milder aspects of the Church life. He spoke of the Pope as liberal, almost socialist in his ideas, and spoke of his endeavours to establish Christian truth everywhere. On the other hand, Dr. Rizzoni presented the sterner aspects of the Papal policy, of its unflinching attitude under every circumstance.

To the young man the evening proved an education on many subjects. He was enabled to see not only the inwardness of these men's natures, and their ideas, but also to get a glimpse of Italian life. He saw that the Church was at war with the State, while the great mass of the young life of Italy was growing indifferent, if not antagonistic, to the ideals of the Church. Reading between the lines, too,

he saw that the life of the Vatican was steeped with plot and intrigue, and that while the priests of the Church were coerced into apparent unity, one part of them battled against the other.

Although neither of these men said so in so many words, he could not help gathering from their conversation that many occupying high positions were anxiously waiting for the old Pope's death, and that hundreds of hungry priests in the city were eagerly looking forward for the crumbs which might fall from the rich man's table when the new Pope should be elected. Even while Leo XIII. was alive, cardinals were busy canvassing for votes, each seeking to outbid the other for popularity. Monsignor Lindley seemed to regard this state of things as natural and right, while Dr. Rizzoni was terribly severe in his condemnation of what he regarded as a worldly policy.

In the midst of their conversation a messenger was announced, who brought letters for both the prelates, and Rutland noticed from the expression on their faces that the news they contained was of the utmost importance.

CHAPTER XXIII

WITHIN THE VATICAN

ON the face of Monsignor Lindley was a look of pleasant expectancy, while Dr. Rizzoni seemed much disturbed.

"The Holy Father is ill," said the former; "he may not live through the night."

"Indeed," said Lady Neville, "I trust this sad occurrence will not oblige you to shorten your stay here?"

"Oh, no," replied Monsignor Lindley, taking another cigar and lighting it, "there will be a gathering at the Vatican to-morrow, but not before."

"If the Holy Father should die," went on Lady Neville, "the question of the future Pope will be settled very soon."

"May God give us all wisdom," said Dr. Rizzoni. "It is an anxious time for us all. It is true that the power of the Holy Father belongs to the office he holds, and not to the man himself; all the same, we are very anxious that he who is chosen of God shall sit in St. Peter's chair."

"But does not the election of the Pope depend entirely on the Council of Cardinals?" asked Rutland. "If so, what has the feelings of others to do with the matter?"

"Ostensibly it depends on the Council you mention, my dear sir," replied Monsieur Lindley, in a tone of importance; "but the Cardinals do not generally act contrary to

the expressed wish of many who may not have a seat in that Council."

Rutland could not help smiling at the implication contained in Monsignor Lindley's words, but the Bishop of Tolisco spoke no word. His face was set and hard, he looked steadily on the floor as though he were thinking deeply.

"Sometimes the election of a Pope has its humorous side," went on Monsignor Lindley. "Why, it is a matter of history that on one occasion the Council of Cardinals met, and when the question as to who should be the next Pope was discussed, one cardinal got up—he was called Cardinal Vespi, I think—and said, 'Well, if you want a Pope who will be popular with the people, doubtless Cardinal Homo is the man; if you want a man who is deeply pious, Cardinal Santa is the man; but if you want a good all-round, sensible fellow, you can't do better than choose me.' And he was chosen too," laughed the Irishman.

"Wasn't there some peculiar circumstance connected with the election of the present Pope?" asked Rutland.

"Oh yes, several, several. No doubt Providence directed the matter, but his election seemed to depend on chance. You know that the representatives of Catholic countries such as Spain and Austria have the power of veto. Well, the representative from Austria was instructed to veto the election of him who is now Leo XIII. But by a strange coincidence he did not reach Rome in time. He was taken ill at Bologna, and had to stay there until it was too late for him to do any harm."

"The Pope seems a man with great will force," remarked Rutland.

"Will power! He has done what no other Pope dared to do. No sooner was he elected than he destroyed

hundreds of offices which were sinecures, but which had existed for hundreds of years. Then at the election of a Pope the custom is for one of those in attendance to place the tiara of the newly selected pontiff on his head, while he takes off the Cardinal's cap which he has been wearing, and gives it to the one who has given him the tiara. This act from time immemorial meant that the man was made Cardinal. But Leo XIII. on his election took a different course. He didn't give his cap to the man who had placed the tiara on his head. Instead he put it in his pocket, and the other is not a Cardinal to this day."

Again Monsignor Lindley laughed pleasantly, while Dr. Rizzoni continued to look thoughtfully on the floor.

"Is the Pope dangerously ill?" asked Lady Neville.

"Yes, dangerously ill," replied Dr. Rizzoni. "Of course he may get over it. He has a wonderful constitution, and can overcome almost anything. Still it is an anxious time. He is fast verging on ninety, and cannot live long. I pray that we may be guided to elect the right man. We need one at this time who will move the world. Another Gregory would do it."

"But I thought the Council could not elect the wrong man," said Rutland. "I thought your belief was that the Holy Spirit guided the Cardinals to elect the right man. If that is so, what need is there for anxiety?"

"You do not understand, you do not understand," said the old Bishop testily. "It is impossible that you should. The right man would change everything. He would bow the neck of the secular Government, he would hearten the whole world; but the wrong man, a man like Lostella, would let the Church drift on the rocks of material power. He would allow liberal ideas to creep in; he would concede this, and concede that, until our power would be gone."

"I do not agree with you," said Monsignor Lindley; "he is a stronger and a wiser man than you think."

Dr. Rizzoni's eyes flashed angrily. "Strong, wise!" he cried; "why, think of his attitude in relation to the Index. When I felt it my duty to bring forward the case of Schmidt, that German heretic, who, in a land steeped with heresy, taught liberal ideas to his students, and was publishing books that meant the right of individual judgment in religious matters, what did he do? He pleaded that he should be allowed to go on, and that he should not be called upon to withdraw his books. What could be worse? His action, moreover, made Schmidt bold, and for a long time he held out. Indeed, he did not yield until I made him feel that the Congregation was in earnest."

"Of course that was a bad case," said Monsignor Lindley; "but he learnt wisdom by that affair."

"Then the Index is still in force?" said Rutland.

"In force!" cried the old Bishop; "how can it be otherwise? How could we check error else? Why, if the power of the Index were abolished, we should have free-thought in the Church, we should have men daring to set up their opinions against the teaching of the Holy See. We have far too much liberalism already. Men in countries like England are allowed a freedom which can end in no good. No, no, when any man seeks to touch the doctrine of the Church, he must be stopped."

"And yet it is a dead letter in most countries," said Rutland.

"That is because the law of the Church is not the law of the people."

"But what would you have?" asked Rutland. "How do you think books ought to be treated?"

"The Index should be the most far-reaching force in the world," replied the Bishop. "If the Church were all-powerful,

there would be placed in every great centre, priests whose sole work would be to examine books submitted for publication, so that nothing should be given to the world of which the Church did not approve. In this way we should stamp out heresy at its fountain-head. All scientific books which threw a doubt on doctrine, all novels which disturbed the mind, all volumes which taught morals other than those of the Catholic faith would be burnt in unquenchable fire."

"But what effect would this have on the mental and moral condition of the nations?"

"Effect! Doubt would cease to be. There would be one fold, and one Shepherd. Nothing would be taught but the truth of God; the Church would be supreme in every realm of life."

"Would you also have it that every law passed in the legislative assemblies should be submitted to the Church?"

"Is not this the will of God?" cried the old Bishop. "The Church represents God on earth. It is infallible on all matters of faith and doctrine, therefore when that time comes, as it surely will come, the world will be governed by God through the Church."

The old man rose to his feet, and his eyes burnt like coals of fire. "This is the Church's hope, the Church's ideal," he cried. "Think of it! The world governed from St. Peter's! the world ruled by the Church of Christ, while all the forces of life, material, intellectual, moral, are used as she dictates! That is why we cannot allow compromise, that is why the Church must at all times, and under all circumstances, make her own conditions. We can no more make terms with men, or institutions, or nations, than God can. Why, think of it! Gladstone, that arch-heretic, who calls himself a High Churchman, wanted the Holy Father to recognise Anglican orders! But it could not be. It rejoiced me that Leo was firm. He saw, as we

all see, that the English Church was heretical. Every Anglican clergyman is nothing more than a layman, and all of them blaspheme every time they pretend to fill holy offices."

In spite of himself, Rutland could not help being impressed by the old Bishop's unflinching ultramontaniam. He saw, too, that if his conception of the Church were true, he stood upon safe ground. But was the Church an organisation such as he had conceived it? Did the Catholic Church as an organisation express the will of God?

A dozen questions rose to his lips, and he scarcely knew which to put first. He looked towards Alizon and saw that she was watching him eagerly. For the moment she was carried away by the stern old Bishop's words, and she wondered what effect they would have upon the young minister.

"It ill becomes me, perhaps, to argue with you," he said, "but do you mean to say that none but those who can accept the doctrines of your Church belong to the Church of Christ?"

"Not really; how can they?"

"Then you do not believe that the true Church overleaps the bounds of all organisations, that it is the Spirit of Christ permeating society?"

"Such a statement is so much wind," cried the Bishop angrily. "The true Church must be visible, it must be united, and it must be the Church of which St. Peter was the first Pope. Without those conditions you cannot have authority, or infallibility. Without that you have merely a rope of sand. There is but one true Church, and all outside it are heretics, and the one true Church is the Holy Catholic Infallible Church."

"If that is so," cried Rutland, "how is it that those states in Italy which were governed from the Vatican, and

over which the Pope had temporal as well as spiritual power, were the worst governed in Italy? And how is it that these same states were the most ignorant, the most immoral, and the most degraded in the land?"

"Those are but the lies of Protestant historians," replied the old Bishop.

"Believe me, I am asking these questions seriously," went on the young man. "They interest me more than you can think; and on the solution of these difficulties my life's happiness seems to depend. I am not carping. I have read the history of this country, written by Catholic historians, and they practically agree with the writings of Protestants concerning these same matters. Your ideas concerning one visible and universal Church governing all the life of the world according to the will of God are beautiful; but then one has to look at facts. If the Catholic Church rules as God rules, how is it that Catholic countries are lowest in the scale of civilisation? Here in Italy you are miles behind England in all that makes for righteousness. I admire beyond words your stupendous organisations for converting the world, only here in Italy, the home of your Church, you are drifting to atheism and to ruin; while the forces which seem to be putting forth efforts to save the nation, are those which are under the ban of the Vatican."

"But, my young friend," said Monsignor Lindley, "you are confounding material prosperity with real prosperity. The only real prosperity is the advancement of faith and religion."

"Yes, but the faith and religion which does not express itself in holy life is surely false."

"True, quite true," cried the Bishop, "and what holier lives can be found in the world than those which have been nurtured by the faith, the fostering care of the Church?"

Think of her saints, think of that innumerable host which have lived, and are living, the life of God in the world."

"I gladly recognise them," said Rutland, "and the same could be said concerning Protestant Churches; but I am thinking of its general effect on the general life. I will not enlarge on the terrible condition of Spain, which is perhaps the most Catholic country in the world; but I am thinking of England. There you number about one in sixteen of the population, and yet the Catholics supply practically one in four of the criminals of the country."

For a moment the two priests were silent; then Monsignor Lindley said, "You are sure of that?"

"They are the figures of the Government officials," replied Rutland.

"And what then?" cried the inflexible Bishop. "These statements are simply suggested by Protestant heresy. We have to think not of time, but of eternity. We have to deal with the great facts of the Church as our blessed Lord taught them. 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.' No amount of morality will save men from hell, but the humble acceptance of, and unquestioning obedience to, the laws and doctrines of the Church."

"Our Lord also said at the close of His Sermon on the Mount, that those who heard His sayings and *did* them, He would liken to those who built their house upon a rock, but those who *did them not* were like those who built on the sand."

"That is true, and the sayings of our blessed Lord are expressed in the doctrines of the Church. All other interpretations of those words are of the devil," cried the Bishop. "It all lies here, young man. Salvation for eternity lies in the Church, damnation remains for those who stay outside. It is for all of us to remember this, and obey. All reason-

ings about such matters are futile, they are of the devil ; we must believe and obey. I am glad you have come to Rome. Study the Church well, see her as she really is, and may God give you light."

The two priests prepared to leave, and Lady Neville rose to accompany them to the door ; but Alizon sat like one stunned. She had scarcely spoken for the night, and yet she had not missed a word that had been said. Often she had looked towards Rutland with longing, wondering eyes, as though she would read his innermost thoughts. The conversation, Catholic though she was, had in many respects been a revelation to her. In England the disposition towards Protestants was far more charitable and liberal than here in Rome, while the unflinching ultramontaniam of Dr. Rizzoni was almost unheard of. In England, moreover, the plea was that Roman Catholicism was reasonable, while here reason seemed to be lightly regarded.

Rutland did not stay long after Lady Neville had bidden her visitors "good-night." With a wondering look in his eyes he sought his room, and for many hours he lay thinking over what had been said through the night, and wondering what the future would bring forth. When morning came, and he found his way into the dining-room, both Lady Neville and Alizon met him with a bright smile.

"And what is your programme for to-day, Mr. Rutland?" asked Lady Neville.

"I have arranged to meet Father Matthew," replied Rutland. "He has promised to take me through the Vatican. He knows the history of many of the most famous pictures there, and I am anticipating a pleasant time. Wouldn't you like to accompany us, Lady Neville?" he added. "I shall be delighted if you will."

"I should like to do so very much ; but I have arranged

to make some calls to-day. I dare say, however, that Alizon will be glad to accept your offer."

And so it was arranged, although Alizon's presence gave the young man almost as much pain as pleasure. To be in her society had, if possible, made his love more ardent. He felt sure that Lady Neville knew nothing of the passion which consumed him, and thus he appeared to himself as one who acted a double part. And yet he knew not what to do. To avoid her society would seem ungracious, especially in the light of all the kindness they had shown him. Besides, he felt utterly weak in Alizon's presence, and so while he felt that his love was hopeless, he yielded to the influences which bound him more closely to her.

The Vatican proved to be a scene of constant wonder to them. The Sistine Chapel, decorated by the hand of Michael Angelo, the magnificent statuary, the wondrous frescoes, aroused their admiration beyond expression.

"As far as the decorative arts are concerned, the English seem but as ignorant children compared with these Italians," said Rutland.

Father Matthew smiled complacently, but Alizon said nothing, she seemed to be thinking deeply. Presently they came to a picture before which they stood a long time. It is the work of a modern artist, and was painted to commemorate the declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. It is a fresco, perhaps from twenty to thirty feet long, and nearly as many high. It is very largely symbolical, but its meaning is very evident. When Rutland looked at it at first, he could not believe his senses, but after Father Matthew's explanation he could no longer doubt. The lower part of the picture represents Pope Pius IX. standing with arms outstretched, while all around him are the princes of the Church. At the extreme right some angels are represented as holding the Cross,

from which a shaft of light shines and rests on the head of the Pope, illumining his mind while he enunciates the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Above the Pope three colossal figures are portrayed. On the right hand sits Christ, and the centre is the Virgin Mary, whose snowy feet stand on a globe representing the earth; on the left sits God the Father, who holds the world in His hand. The three figures are of equal size, and each is represented as having equal authority. Each has a halo around the head, and each forms a part of the Godhead. Above the head of the Virgin Mary, however, is the figure of a dove, representing the Holy Spirit. The picture from the artist's standpoint is magnificent, from Rutland's standpoint as a believer in the New Testament it seemed like blasphemy. The representation of God as a man with a long beard suggested a ghastly caricature, while the revelation of Mary as equal with God made the young man gasp.

"Is it not fine, is it not magnificent?" cried Father Matthew.

"But what does it mean?" cried Alizon.

"It represents our Blessed Lady as Queen of Heaven and Ruler of the world. Can't you see her snow-white feet stand upon the earth as its ruler, while above her are innumerable angels proclaiming her as Queen of Heaven. Do you know," went on the priest, "that the day on which the dogma was declared was dark and gloomy, but at the very moment the Holy Father declared it as the doctrine of the Church, the sun shone. The Pope regarded this as the smile of heaven sealing his words."

"And this picture was painted by the order of the Pope?" asked Rutland.

"Oh yes; and he was much pleased with it. Look at the Latin inscription underneath. It tells how Pius IX. solemnly proclaimed the doctrine."

"And he accepts this picture as a true representation of the doctrine."

"Oh yes."

Rutland did not speak again concerning the picture; indeed, throughout the rest of the day he was almost silent. The fresco seemed to have impressed him greatly.

When they reached the hotel in the evening, however, all thoughts of the day's sights were for the moment driven from his mind. The news reached him that Lady Neville had been taken seriously ill.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BAMBINO

RUTLAND did not see Alizon for some hours after their return. No sooner did she hear of the dread news than she rushed to her mother's room, and nothing would induce her to leave the bedside. It appeared that just after lunch Lady Neville had been seized with severe pains, while her blood suddenly rose to fever heat. Every endeavour had been made to find Alizon, but in vain. No one knew what part of the city she was visiting, and as Lady Neville had become delirious she could give no information. The nearest doctor had been sent for, who had shaken his head gravely, and suggested that he consulted immediately with an English doctor who resided in Rome. The two physicians were holding a consultation when Alizon arrived. They agreed concerning a prescription, and left about nine o'clock, saying they would call again in the morning, but that if her ladyship was taken worse through the night they were to be immediately sent for.

About midnight her ladyship appeared to become quieter, and dropped into a fitful sleep, and it was not until then that Alizon left the room. When she got into the corridor she saw Rutland walking up and down, and with a grateful heart she went towards him. As far as she

knew he was the only friend she had in the city, and this fact drew her more closely to him.

"I think mother is a little better," she cried.

"I am very glad," replied the young man.

"Have you seen the doctors?"

"Yes, I saw them as they came out."

"Did you speak to them?"

"Yes, I asked them a good many questions."

"And what did they say?"

"Oh, I judged that they regarded the matter hopefully, but they seemed very reticent. They always are, you know."

"Are they? I know so little of doctors. But—but you think mother will get better, don't you?"

"I hope so, I trust so," said Rutland. "I have been praying for you, Miss Alizon, and if I can render any service you will not hesitate to ask me, will you?"

"Oh, thank you. You—you are the only one I could ask in Rome. Mother has friends here; but I do not know them. But it is late. Ought you not to go to bed?"

"I could not sleep if I went. I have stayed here in the corridor hoping that I might be able to help you."

"Have you? I am very glad. I know it is selfish of me; but then I am all alone, and it is helpful to think I have a friend."

"I shall always be that, Miss Alizon, whatever happens."

Tears started to the girl's eyes. "Will you?" she said.

"Yes, I am sure you will," she added.

"And to show that I am your friend, I ask you to go to bed. You ought for your mother's sake."

"But I could not, Mr. Rutland. I must go back by her side. The nurses are all right, I dare say. One is from a convent. She is a very good woman; but she makes me think mother will die."

"Why?"

"Oh, she is always turning up her eyes and praying. She is constantly telling me to send for a priest, too. Do you think I ought, Mr. Rutland?"

"At any rate, one would do no harm," replied the young man. "Her ladyship will very likely be conscious by morning, and the presence of a good man might comfort her."

"Sister Mary says she knows such a holy priest, a Franciscan, and she tells me that his prayers have wrought wondrous cures."

"The prayers of a good man must do good," replied Duncan. "But the doctors will be here early in the morning, you can ask them."

"Yes, I will; but I must go back now, and you ought to go to bed. You have only just recovered from an illness yourself, you know."

"No, I shall not go to bed; but I will lie down on a sofa in your drawing-room if you will let me. I shall be near you then, and ready to render you any service if you need me."

"Oh, you are kind!" said the girl, "good-night."

"Good-night, and remember that God is good. Nothing happens by chance. He never makes a mistake."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am sure. I shall be praying for you."

The girl went back to her mother's room. In spite of her anxiety she felt better for her talk with Rutland. True, he was not a Catholic; but she felt sure that his prayers would help her. He was calm and strong too, and this helped her. She was glad, too, that he was close by. His nearness comforted her. She looked at her mother, and saw that she slept heavily, while the two nurses stood near. One, a nun, prayed audibly, and counted her beads.

At eight o'clock in the morning, the doctors came and held another consultation. Just as they were leaving Rutland spoke to them.

"How do you find her ladyship?" he asked.

"She is very ill," was the reply.

"Worse?"

"No, we should think she is rather better."

"You think she will recover?"

"Oh, yes, I should say so," replied the English doctor. "In about thirty hours from now the fever will leave her, and then she will get better. But in all such cases the fever must run its course."

"I think her daughter would like her to see a priest. I suppose there is no objection to that?"

The Italian doctor smiled scornfully. Like most of the scientific men of Italy, he was an atheist. "Let her by all means," he said flippantly, "it can do no harm. We shall cure her, and the priest will get the credit."

"Pardon me, are you in any way related to the Nevilles?" asked the English doctor.

"No; but I knew them in England, and they regard me as a friend."

"Nothing more, I suppose? I do not ask because of mere curiosity."

"No, nothing more."

"You have no influence with Miss Neville."

"No, none in particular."

"I am sorry for that, because—but, are you a Catholic?"

"No, I am not a Catholic."

"Ah, I am, that is if I am anything; but do your best to persuade Miss Neville to see to it that her ladyship is not frightened."

"What do you mean?"

"One of these nurses is a nun. I have spoken with her,

but some of these women lose their heads. Try and press upon Miss Neville the absolute necessity that her ladyship shall not be excited."

"Yes, I will do my best."

"Of course, the fever may leave her a few hours before I said, and when it does, anything like fear would do her incalculable harm."

"I understand."

"That is well." The two doctors left the room together.

"The Pope is better this morning," said the Italian.

"I suppose so. Wonderful old man, isn't he?"

"Yes, he has a constitution like nails. I suppose he attributes his recovery to the intervention of the Virgin Mary?" and the Italian doctor laughed derisively.

"A lot of the Cardinals will be disappointed again," said the other.

After breakfast Duncan returned to Lady Neville's private drawing-room. He wished to be near in order to render any necessary help; also he longed to be close to Alizon. His heart went out to her more than ever in her anxiety.

During the morning a Franciscan monk came. It was the man so much revered by Sister Mary the nurse. Rutland admired the founder of this Order immensely, and felt kindly disposed to all those who were his followers. This man was called Father Francis, and Rutland looked at him with interest. In appearance, however, he was not suggestive of Francis of Assisi. He was a well-fed man, short and very stout, and he waddled as he walked. His face was like a full moon, and his eyes stood out with fatness. He panted much at climbing the few stairs, and his face was almost purple.

"I am not as young as I was," he said; "but I have come, Sister Mary. Take me to her ladyship at once."

Rutland could not help smiling as the brown-frocked brother found his way into the sick-room. He seemed so utterly incapable of imparting spiritual help.

After about half an hour, Alizon brought the priest into the drawing-room where Rutland sat. Alizon's eyes were wet with tears, her face was drawn and pale.

"Mother is saying such strange things," said the girl, "she is quite delirious. Oh, I am afraid she is going to die!"

"Do not be afraid," replied Rutland; "both doctors told me this morning that they thought she would get better. The fever will have run its course by to-morrow night."

"We must trust to the Blessed Virgin," said the old priest. "Let the doctors do all they can; but I trust in the sacred offices of the Church. I believe her ladyship will get better, not because of what the doctors have said, but because of the intervention of our Holy Mother. The Church can still work miracles," he added.

Rutland smiled.

"Why, think of the wondrous things done at Lourdes," said the old man. "Hundreds of cases have been given up by the doctors, and yet they have been completely cured by the Blessed Virgin in her grotto. There can be no doubt about these cases. All have been critically investigated by eminent doctors."

Still Rutland was silent.

"Oh, I wish we had some such power here!" cried Alizon. "Cannot something be done, Father Francis? This is Rome. Could not the Holy Father be persuaded to do something?" The girl spoke excitedly; she was almost beside herself.

"Yes, something can be done," cried the priest. "I was going to tell you about it. Surely you have heard of the Bambino in the ARACELI!"

Alizon shook her head.

"Can it be possible!" cried the old man. "I thought the history of its miracles had reached even benighted England."

"What is it?" asked Rutland. "A Bambino is a child, is it not?"

"Yes. It is the figure of the blessed Child Jesus. It has wrought, oh! such wonderful cures. Cardinals, Bishops, and old Roman nobles have been given up by doctors, and then the Bambino has been sent for, and, lo, no sooner has the blessed figure of the Holy Child entered the house than the patient has got better."

"Is this possible?" cried Alizon.

"Possible!" repeated the old priest, "possible! Why, ask any one in Rome! Of course, the Jesuits and the Dominicans do not say much about it, but that is because they are jealous that our Order possesses such a miraculous relic. But, my dear child, even Cardinal Lostella himself was cured by it, the Bishop of Tolisco was dragged back from the very jaws of death by its power; why, during the last few years the blessed Bambino has wrought cures upon the most exalted people in Rome. By the blessing of God that sainted Child shall cure your mother too!"

"And can you bring it here?" asked Alizon.

"I can obtain it for you. I must speak to the General of our Order, and obtain permission; then I must get a carriage and horses, and after that another brother and myself will accompany the sacred Child here."

"Is the figure large that you need a carriage?" asked Rutland, smiling in spite of himself.

"Oh no, it is not large, but we pay honour to the Blessed Bambino. It is drawn by two horses, just as a Cardinal is, and it has a crown on its head. It was

crowned by the Holy Father's Secretary of State. I will have it brought in all its jewels."

"Jewels?" said Rutland.

"Yes, it is covered with jewels. It has wrought so many miracles that the recipients have covered it with costly presents; it has been a source of vast revenue to our Church too. People like to give large offerings, you know," added the priest.

"And it has really worked miracles?" queried Alizon, like one in doubt.

"Why, yes, my child, yes, hundreds, thousands! Heaven only knows the number of people it has cured. The Holy Father thinks highly of it too, it is not generally talked about: but many believe that it is through the Bambino that his life has been prolonged. He has sanctioned a prayer in honour of the image, and on January 18, 1894, Leo XIII. accorded a hundred days' indulgence, applicable to all souls in Purgatory, for every time this prayer was repeated with contrition. The indulgence can be gained every day. Why, it is the most renowned relic in Rome, more renowned even than that of the Blessed Virgin herself!"

At this moment Sister Mary the nun entered the room.

"You are speaking of the Blessed Bambino in the Araceli," she cried. "Oh, yes, bring it, Father Francis, bring it."

Alizon looked at Rutland as if in doubt, but the young man's face was perfectly motionless.

"Yes, send for it," she cried. "If it has been blessed to so many people, it may also restore my mother to health."

"By the blessing of the Church, and through the prayers of her children, it will be blessed," cried the old man. "Oh, it has a wonderful history. I will tell you about it to-night when I bring it. If, indeed, the General of our

Order condescends to allow it to be taken out of the Church."

"But surely there can be no doubt about it?" cried Alizon.

"I hope not, I think not. And when her ladyship is cured she will doubtless remember the power of the blessed image, and show her thankfulness."

"Oh, I am sure she will," cried Alizon.

"I think, I *think*, our General will give his consent," said the priest, as though he were in doubt; "it is seldom taken out of the Church now except to confer a blessing on some renowned and faithful member of the Church. Why, the last time it was taken to a sick-bed, and the patient recovered, it was for an Italian Countess, Countess Palanti, doubtless you have heard of her. She belongs to an old Italian family, but she has lost nearly all her fortune, as so many more of them have. When she recovered she was exercised greatly how she should manifest her gratitude. She had no money, but she possessed some old family jewels, and although they were very precious to her, she sold some of them in order to give one thousand lire (francs) to our Order."

"Oh," cried Alizon, "if my mother is cured, I will give two thousand lire to your Order."

"Ah!" cried the old man, taking his snuff-box from his pocket, and taking a pinch with evident enjoyment, "of course, we Brothers of the Order of St. Francis possess nothing. We have taken the vow of poverty, and have but few luxuries, indeed, our vows forbid it; but our Order needs money in order to carry on its great missionary work. But I will go straight to our General."

"Let me accompany you to the street," said Rutland, "you may get lost in the passages," and he led the way downstairs, the old monk following him.

"Have you seen our Church?" asked the old man.

"No, not yet. I have seen your General though, I visited him the other day with Father Matthew, of the Society of Jesus."

"Oh, indeed, and what is your name?"

Rutland told him.

"Ah, I heard him speak of you. And you are a friend of Lady Neville. Oh, I shall be able to prevail on him, I have no doubt. Lady Neville is a faithful child of the Church, I suppose?"

"Oh yes."

"The titled people of England are not poor like those in Italy, are they? I have been in England myself. I learnt your language there. I think I have heard that Lady Neville is rich."

"Yes, I believe she is. How long will it take you to walk to the monastery?"

"Oh, a good while. It is half an hour's journey for me, I am getting old and stout. Simple living agrees with me, you see."

"Let me call you a carriage."

"Oh, there is no need. We followers of St. Francis always walk."

"But this is a special circumstance," said Rutland, noting the look in the old man's eye, "you will be able to get there in a few minutes then."

"Then let it be a close carriage, my son, a close carriage."

A few minutes later Rutland was back in Lady Neville's drawing-room again.

"Oh, I am so frightened!" cried Alizon. "That Sister Mary is such a good woman, such a holy woman, but she makes me think mother will die. She has such an awful expression on her face when she looks at her, and moans

out her prayers as though she were afraid. The other nurse fell asleep through the night, and I was alone with her. I don't think I should be frightened a bit, but she is always talking about death."

"Do not fear," said Rutland, "both the doctors seem capable men, and they agree that the fever will cease to-morrow night. It will begin to abate soon now, and then your mother will be better."

"Do you believe in this Bambino, Mr. Rutland?"

"It doesn't matter what I believe. I am sure Father Francis has faith in its miraculous power, and that he has implicit confidence that it will make your mother well. I suppose he has been praying beside her?"

"Yes," said the girl absently; "and Sister Mary says he is such a holy man. Do you think so?"

"He is doubtless a sincere believer," said Rutland.

The doctors called again during the afternoon, and reported favourably concerning her ladyship's condition. The fever would soon begin to abate, they said. Their words, however, brought no comfort to Sister Mary, who bade Alison not to trust to the skill of man, but in the intercession of the saints, and in the goodness of the blessed Virgin.

"Whatever happens, her ladyship is safe," she said. "You will be able to have many masses said for her and perhaps she may be in purgatory only a very short time."

"Please do not talk of death, nor of Purgatory," said Alison. "My mother must get well, she *will* get well!"

"Let us hope so," said Sister Mary lugubrously. "The Blessed Bambino will be here to-night, I hope; and its power is wonderful. If she does recover I shall attribute it solely to its blessed power."

The day passed slowly away, Alison scarcely leaving her mother's bedside. At eleven o'clock at night a messenger

came to announce that Father Francis and Father Anthony had come in a carriage, and that they had brought something to take to her ladyship's room.

"Ah, the Blessed Virgin be praised!" said Sister Mary, "they have brought the holy image."

"I shall be glad if you will go and meet them," said Alizon to Rutland.

The young man found his way to the front door, where a carriage and two horses stood, while two brown-frocked friars stood as if guarding a great treasure.

"Have you brought it?" asked Rutland.

"Yes," said Father Francis.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW THE BAMBINO CURED LADY NEVILLE

RUTLAND led the way while the brown-frosted faïers carried their precious burden along the corridors of the hotel and up to her ladyship's room. Most of the visitors had gone to bed, and none but the few waiters who watched the proceedings, some with awe, and others with a look of amusement, knew of the advent of the sacred image. Brother Francis and Brother Anthony carried the thing into her ladyship's drawing-room, and then took off its many wrappings. Then when its outer adornments had been pulled aside, the little thing appeared to Rutland's gaze, just as it may be seen at the Church of The Aracœli (Altar of Heaven), by any visitor to Rome. He saw that it was about two feet long, and was lavishly decorated with gaudy ornaments. The young man looked at the relic long and steadily, while the monks knelt before it and muttered a prayer. The figure of the little child interested him greatly, not simply because of the stories told about it, but because of the system of which it formed a part. This little inanimate figure was blessed by the Pope, a pamphlet had been written on its virtues, and issued with the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities. He had gone into the Via Condotti after dinner, and had bought a picture of the image, and had carefully read the inscription and the

prayer which were associated with it. On translating the former, which was written in French, he read as follows :

"Prayer in honour of the Infant Jesus, whose miraculous image is venerated within the Church of the Altar of Heaven in Rome, and crowned by the Authorities of the Vatican on May 2, 1897."

The Pope and the Authorities of the Vatican then had declared the little wooden figure to be miraculous ; therefore it formed a part of the faith of the Church. As the priests knelt before it, he could not help thinking of the second commandment, and of the battle cries of the sturdy Protestants of the Netherlands. He saw, moreover, that the Bambino had a round, badly-carved face, and was altogether destitute of beauty ; but no part of the body could be seen because it was covered with gaudy apparel. On its head was a crown surmounted by a cross that glittered with jewels. On every part of the body gay-coloured stones had been placed. A golden chain was hung around its neck, and on its little arms all sorts of baubles were placed. The clothes which covered the shapeless form were decorated with all sorts of designs wrought in gold and precious stones. On its breast was a glittering star, while at the part of the form where the knees should be, a cross was placed, and underneath the letters I.H.S. were traced in shining stones.

While he looked Alizon entered.

"Is this it ?" she asked.

"Yes, my child," said Brother Francis, "I was able to prevail on our Superior to let me bring the Holy Child to your mother's bedside."

Alizon looked at it like one fascinated. She had been bred a Catholic, and had been taught to believe in Catholic legends ; but as she gazed at the little thing a cold feeling came into her heart. A chilling wave of doubt swept over

her. What good could this poor little doll do to her mother? It was only painted wood covered with tinselled drapery and gaudy ornaments. What miraculous power could it have? Was it not foolishness, yes, worse than foolishness, was it not blasphemy to fall down before the senseless object and offer prayers?

But this was only for a second. She drove her doubts from her. Who was she to doubt what the Holy Father and the Vatican Council had declared miraculous?

"Will you take it in at once?" she said.

The two monks carried the Bambino into the sick-room and placed it on the bed.

Lady Neville looked towards them as they entered, but there was no look of intelligence in her eyes. The priests performed the customary rites, but she heeded them not. She was moaning something about the deer-parks around the Priory, and then she spoke of Sir Charles Neville, her late husband.

"Her hand has touched the blessed Bambino," said Brother Francis presently. "By the blessing of our Holy Mother, she will get better."

Meanwhile Sister Mary was frantically praying, the other nurse looking on with a scornful smile.

For a few minutes Alizon watched. She had heard how in olden times when the sick had touched even the robe of Christ that virtue went out of Him and He healed them. But her mother had touched this figure, and nothing had happened.

"Oh, she will die!" thought the girl, "my mother will die!"

Ordinarily Alizon was self-possessed; but the thought of losing her mother had unnerved her, while the continuous moanings of Sister Mary had made the young girl anticipate the most terrible things.

An hour passed away, during which time the monks remained, and the Bambino remained on the bed beside her ladyship; but the patient seemed worse rather than better. The fever rose rather than abated, and she talked more incessantly, more incoherently.

"Be patient, my child," said Brother Francis, as he noted Alizon's grief; "the Blessed Child will heal her."

"It is time her ladyship took her medicine," said the nurse, who had not participated in the rites.

"There is no need," said Sister Mary.

"I obey the doctors," replied the woman, pouring out the medicine.

She gave it to her ladyship, and then retired from the bedside. About half an hour later the patient became better, and fell asleep.

"Did I not tell you?" said Brother Francis. "Her recovery is beginning. I take this as an omen from heaven."

Sister Mary sobbed out her thankfulness, and the two priests spoke to each other in Italian; but Alizon spoke no word. In her eyes was a strange expression. Bewilderment, faith, doubt were all there.

Meanwhile Duncan sat in the drawing-room. He had slept a little through the day; but only a little. The thought of Alizon's anguish made rest almost impossible. He was anxiously awaiting news, for he was afraid lest all the excitement should hinder her ladyship's recovery rather than help it. Presently Alizon and Brother Francis returned.

"Mother is better," said the girl. "For an hour or so she seemed worse, but she has fallen asleep now."

"Yes," said the sceptical nurse, who had followed them, having to fetch something from the drawing-room, "the medicine I gave her is very soothing."

Brother Francis looked at her indignantly, but said nothing. He disliked this woman very much.

"Yes," he said, "her ladyship is better. Ah, it is not the first time I have taken the blessed Bambino to work its cures."

Rutland did not reply, he felt the utter uselessness of saying what he thought to the old monk. Besides, why should he speak of his unbelief to Alizon? If she derived comfort from the presence of the wooden figure, he would not seek to take it away. And yet the whole episode was a revelation of the mental condition of the Roman Church. From the Pope down to the brown-frocked friar, they all regarded the Bambino as a miraculous image. They venerated it, and believed in its healing power.

"I am glad her ladyship is better," he said to Alizon. "I hope you will be persuaded to take a little rest now."

"I cannot, I cannot," said the girl. "I shall not be able to sleep until I know that mother is out of danger. You see, everything has come on so suddenly, and—and I am all alone!"

"No, no, my child," said Brother Francis, "the blessed Virgin will be near to help you. Do not be afraid."

The girl started up and went to her mother's room. Lady Neville was still sleeping quietly, while beside her was the Bambino. Alizon thought of her own childhood's days when it comforted her to have a doll by her side when she went to bed. She remembered how her playthings became real persons to her, and how she used to talk to them and call them by their names. But she was no longer a child, and she had discarded dolls with the rest of her childish associations. For a moment it seemed as though her mother was a child again, and that she was soothed by a senseless bit of wood. She looked at the grotesque form by her mother's side, and wondered. It was painted wood,

that was all. Just a bit of lifeless stick carved into the likeness of a child. Its eyes were glass, and stared vacantly at her, there was no volition, no intelligence, no soul in the poor little thing. But then it was declared miraculous by the Pope himself; it was crowned by the Vatican Council, its power was claimed by Cardinals and Bishops, it was venerated in one of the most renowned churches in Rome.

She left the room hurriedly, and came back to the room where Brother Francis and Rutland were sitting.

"Yes," the old priest was saying, "the sainted Bambino has had a most remarkable history. It was carved by one of our brothers in Jerusalem. The wood was cut from the Mount of Olives. Doubtless the tree must have been at some time associated with our blessed Lord. After he had carved it he was ordered to Rome, and so he had a box made, and brought it with him. While on the sea, a dreadful storm arose, and there was great danger lest the vessel and all hands on board should be lost. The captain gave orders that everything in the shape of baggage should be thrown overboard. This was done, and everything immediately sunk beneath the waves except the box containing the figure which our brother had carved. After a time the captain and the crew noticed that wherever the ship went the box followed. Some one said that it belonged to a Franciscan friar. Our brother was called, who immediately told the captain that if the box was taken aboard, the ship should be saved, and all hands should safely arrive on land.

"The blessed Bambino was taken on to the boat and immediately the storm ceased. As you may imagine, the joy among the sailors was very great, and all of them knelt before the figure which had saved them from death.

"When our brother reached Rome, he found that news of the wonderful child had gone before him, and the

Aracœli was simply thronged with people to see it. Sick people came, and went away well, and then our brothers at the monastery saw that the blessed Bambino had healing power. After that it was taken to the houses of sick people, and immediately they got well. No matter to whom it was taken, rich or poor, noble or humble, wherever it was received with faith it healed the people."

Brother Francis took a pinch of snuff, and looked towards his listeners to see what impression his tale was making. He noticed that Alizon was watching him with wondering eyes, and that Rutland sat looking on the ground.

"Ah, but," went on Brother Francis, "there were those who took advantage of the kindness of our Church, and the healing powers of the sainted Bambino. One day a woman came to us telling us that her child was ill, and asked that the Bambino might be brought. Nothing doubting, our brothers took it to the woman's house, and left it there. The woman's child got better, and so three days afterwards our brothers went for the image of the infant Jesus. The woman said she had carefully packed it in the box, and it was taken back to the Church and put behind the altar. When all the brothers had got to bed that night, they were wakened by some one knocking at the monastery door. One got up and looked out. It was a bitterly cold night, and freezing hard.

" 'Who's knocking?' asked Brother Philip, who had got up.

"But the only answer he heard was the cry of a child. Brother Philip immediately went downstairs and opened the door, and there he saw the blessed Bambino, who had come all the way through the cold night.

"Then we all saw how the woman had deceived us. She had made an image in the likeness of the one we had

taken to her, and had kept the real one. But the blessed Child, seeing how the brothers had been deceived, came back of its own accord."

Brother Francis ceased, and took another pinch of snuff.

"I suppose there is no doubt about this story?" asked Alizon.

"Doubt, my child? Oh no! Ever since that time two brothers have always accompanied the blessed image. It is always brought in a carriage, and taken away in the same way."

"And how long will it stay in my mother's room?" asked Alizon.

"I must take it back in the morning," replied Brother Francis. "With your consent I will lie on the sofa until then."

Sister Mary came into the room. "Her ladyship is much better," she said; "she is sleeping like an infant, and the blessed Bambino is by her side. Oh, it is beautiful! beautiful!"

"Then surely you can rest," said Rutland, turning to Alizon, "you may sleep in peace now!"

"I cannot, I cannot," said the girl. "I am too excited, I feel as though I want to go out into the open air."

"Well, it may do you good," said Rutland. "The hotel is not closed. The last train has not arrived from Genoa yet. Let me go with you, shall I?"

Alizon threw a shawl over her shoulders and the two walked down the stairs and along the corridor towards the entrance hall. The hall-porter rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"The last train has not arrived yet, I suppose?" said Rutland.

"No, signore," replied the man, "it is late, very. Half hour yet, I think."

"This door will be open till then, I suppose?"

"It will, signore. The Countess better is, I hope."

"Yes, I think her ladyship is better."

"And signorina," said the man, bowing politely and looking at Alizon, "she is not bad ill, I trust?"

"Very tired, that is all," said Alizon, with a wan smile. "I am come down for a little fresh air."

"The air is good to-night," said the porter, "molto bello, what you call very beautiful. It is not always so here at night."

The two walked towards the Piazza di Spagna. Neither of them spoke while they were in the Via del Babuino, but when they reached the monument in the middle of the Piazza di Spagna, they both stood still. It was one of those nights the like of which can only be seen in Italy. Above, the moon sailed in a cloudless sky, and shone so brightly that only a few stars were visible. Around them was utter silence. The artists' models, the flower-sellers, and others who ply their trade in this spot had all gone, the steps which led up to St. Trinita di Monti were empty. The great church with its two towers seemed to look down upon them sadly. Behind, the night-wind blew softly through the leaves of the trees in the Pincia Gardens. The air, though chilly, was pure and bracing.

As they looked up, more stars appeared to their gaze, the heavens seemed to be peopled with new worlds.

"How little we are!" and Alizon shivered.

"How great God is!" answered Rutland.

"But He came to earth as a little child," said Alizon.

"Yes, to reveal His love, and to show us the way of life," replied the young man.

Alizon was silent.

Rutland saw that she was strangely wrought upon.

"See, yonder is a tablet erected to the memory of the

poet Keats," said Rutland, seeking to distract her mind, "the light is so good that we can read it."

"Let us go back," said Alizon.

The young man obeyed without a word, and a few minutes later they were back in the hotel again.

In the corridor they saw one of the nurses.

"Her ladyship continues better," said the woman.

"Everything is happening just as the doctor said."

"Oh, I am glad!" cried the girl.

"I hope you will get some rest now," said Rutland.

"You ought for your mother's sake. Believe me, you will be a sorry nurse unless you study your own health."

Alizon answered him by a wan smile, and then found her way to her mother's room. Lady Neville was sleeping quietly. The fever had much abated, and her whole appearance bespoke a change for the better.

"Thank God! thank God!" she ejaculated. "Yes, I can rest now."

She went to the drawing-room where Brother Francis lay on the sofa. His mouth was wide open, and he snored vigorously. Alizon could not help smiling, for a more grotesque form it would be hard to conceive. It would be difficult to find a man whose personal appearance suggested spiritual things less than that of Brother Francis. His red, healthy skin, his widely-extended mouth, and his fat, stodgy figure, suggested a perfect digestion and freedom from care. It was impossible to conceive that this man had ever grappled with intellectual difficulties, or faced the great problems of the spiritual world.

The girl was about to leave the room when she caught sight of a book lying on the table. On examining it she at first gave a start, then cast a hasty glance around the room. Yes, she was unobserved, no one was there but the sleeping

priest. With hurried steps she went to her bedroom, taking the book with her.

Arrived there she examined the room as though she were afraid, but after making sure that she was alone, she locked the door, and then drawing a wicker-chair under the electric light, she sat down and buried her face in her hands. For more than an hour she sat thus. Evidently she was thinking deeply, and when presently she lifted her head, her eyes shone with a strange light. She rose from her chair, and for some time walked to and fro in the room, then she sat down and began reading the book she had brought with her.

"Mr. Rutland must have left it there," she said. "Yes, it is his, his name is on the title-page."

For a little time she seemed to be in doubt about something; she was evidently nervous too, for her hand trembled like an aspen leaf.

"I can't sleep," she cried impatiently; "I must do something. I will go into mother's room again."

The girl hurried out, locking the door behind her, and a few seconds later she was standing by her mother's bedside.

Lady Neville was still sleeping quietly. There could be no doubt about it, she was much better. By her side was the grotesque little figure of the wooden Bambino, whose glassy eyes seemed staring into vacancy.

Alizon turned away hurriedly, and returned to her bedroom, carefully locking the door. Taking up Rutland's book again, she read for more than two hours. Evidently she was much interested, for she turned the leaves hurriedly, never lifting her eyes from the pages. When she had finished, she glanced around the room like one afraid. She looked at her watch, and her eyes expressed wonder.

"I had no idea it was so late," she said, pulling up the blind. The sun was rising in a clear sky, all nature was awaking into life.

She fell beside her bed, and remained kneeling until she heard some one knocking at her door.

CHAPTER XXVI

SIGHT-SEEING

THREE days later Lady Neville, although still weak, was pronounced by the doctors to be out of all danger. Her illness had been short, but it had been severe. Brother Francis attributed her speedy recovery to the healing power of the Bambino ; Sister Mary uttered many pious ejaculations, and praised the virtues of the sainted child. The other nurse smiled scornfully, while the doctors shrugged their shoulders.

"Pah," said the Italian physician, "did I not say that we should cure her and the doll would get the credit? But what does it matter?" and he laughed contemptuously.

Meanwhile the Bambino was taken back to the Franciscan Church, and placed in its little cabinet behind the altar. Rutland said nothing about Lady Neville's cure, and Alizon was also very reticent. She was overjoyed at her mother's return to health, but spoke to no one concerning the means which had been used. Indeed, she seemed anxious to abstain from all reference to the Bambino, for when one day Sister Mary, the pious Catholic nurse, assured her ladyship that her recovery had been a miracle, and then looked to Alizon for confirmation of her words, the girl left the room hastily without replying.

For several days Rutland scarcely saw her. She remained in close attendance on her mother, and did not appear in the public rooms even at dinner. And so the young man continued his tours around Rome, sometimes in company with Father Matthew, sometimes alone. He said nothing concerning his opinions of what he saw, but he was none the less observant. He asked many questions, and took careful note of the answers given. Evidently, too, he was deeply impressed. On one occasion when Father Matthew accompanied him to the great Church of St. John's Lateran, where a number of young priests were ordained, the Jesuit observed that he never took his eyes away from the officiating Bishop and the young men, who claimed that morning to be endowed with priestly power.

"Very impressive, isn't it?" asked Father Matthew.

"It is exceedingly interesting," replied Rutland, but although Father Matthew asked him many questions, he did not tell him what he really thought of the gorgeous ceremonial.

Also when visiting the renowned Jesuit Church of Rome, and the rooms where Ignatius Loyola wrote his famous Constitutions, he seemed like one in a trance. Father Matthew had difficulty in getting him away. He went from one room to another, and then revisited them as if anxious that nothing should escape him. Especially did he linger in the apartment where Ignatius saw a vision of the Trinity, and where a picture, which translated the vision on canvas, was exhibited. He asked many questions concerning the circumstances which attended the vision, and appeared much disappointed at the vague answers given. Then again, when examining the many relics for which this, the head-quarters of the Jesuits, is famous, he asked for some proof of their miraculous power, he was evidently much disappointed in the priest's replies.

"Oh, there can be no doubt about their healing power," Father Matthew would say again and again.

"Yes, but what proof do you offer to a sceptic?"

"Well, now," replied the priest, "take this finger. It belonged to a most holy nun. There was a movement on foot for her beatification, and, of course, before this could be done it had to be proved that the nun, whose name was Teresa, had worked a miracle. Well, this finger," and the priest pointed to a bit of dried bone which lay under the glass case before them, "had been preserved. It was taken to a woman, who, the doctors declared, was dying, and immediately it was placed in the dying woman's hand she got well."

"Who was the woman?"

"I really don't know."

"Where did she live?"

"Here in Rome."

"How long ago?"

"Oh, sixty or seventy years since."

"But you don't know her name?"

"Oh, no."

"But who were the doctors who declared that she was dying?"

"I really don't know."

"But did they sign a certificate to the effect that the woman was dying?"

"I really never thought of it."

"Do you know if these doctors were deeply learned in the laws of health, and in the science of medicine?"

"Oh, there can be no doubt they would be. You see Teresa was made a saint, and consequently the matter would be carefully investigated. The Devil's Advocate would see to it that every point was discussed. Why, it took a long time to prove the case; indeed, it was one of

the most expensive cases of the century. It cost over £3,000."

"Cost over £3,000 to make a saint! How?"

"Well, you see, when the desire was expressed to make her a saint, there was a lot of opposition on the part of the Devil's Advocate. You see, there are always two advocates appointed by the Church when there is an attempt made for the canonisation, or beatification of any one. One advocate argues in favour of the holiness, and the miraculous power of the departed one; and the other argues against it. The latter is called the Devil's Advocate. Of course, a Council of the Church is called to adjudicate; and thus you see what with fees paid to the advocates, to the Council, and to the Holy Father, it becomes a very expensive matter. In this case there was much controversy, and it swallowed up over £3,000."

"Of course, this money goes to the funds of the Church."

"Of course; and to the advocates."

"I see. That is always the case, whether the man or woman is made a saint or not?"

"Certainly."

The foregoing is a sample of many of the conversations which took place as Rutland visited one sacred shrine after another. The young minister gave no opinion on anything he saw or heard; but he was evidently deeply impressed.

When Lady Neville was sufficiently recovered, she asked Rutland to dine with her in her private dining-room, and the young man, although almost dreading spending the evening with Alizon, consented. Try as he might he could not destroy the love which he again and again told himself was madness. And thus it was while it gave him pain to be near her and to speak with her, he was unable to resist

the spell which she had cast upon him. No man knows how weak he really is until he falls in love. Then, in many cases, reason goes by the board, and men who are sane and strong in others matters, become the sport of passing impulses.

"I am afraid," said Lady Neville during the evening, "that Alizon is having what the Lancashire people call a 'weary time.'"

"No, mother," cried Alizon, "I am very happy now you are getting well."

"I don't like your pale cheeks, my darling," said her ladyship, "and yet I am not strong enough to take much exercise."

"Can I be of any service?" asked Rutland. "If Miss Alizon will accompany me on my journeys around the city, I shall be delighted."

"No, no, mother," cried Alizon, "I do not wish to leave you. I am much happier with you."

"But there is no reason why you should stay with me, my dear," said her ladyship. "It is a fortnight now since I was taken ill, and in that time you have scarcely left my side."

"I have a splendid excursion mapped out for to-morrow," said Rutland, yielding to his longing to spend another day in Alizon's company. "In the morning I am visiting 'the Sacred Steps' close by St. John's Lateran. After that I am going to a church where a part of the true Cross is exhibited. Then I have arranged to go to the Trappist Monastery, where it is said St. Paul was beheaded. On my way there I pass by the church built on the spot where Father Matthew says St. Peter saw our Lord. On the following day I hope to visit the Forum, and also to see the dungeon where St. Peter was imprisoned. If I have time I shall call at the church where the miraculous image of

the Virgin Mary is placed. Possibly also I may be able to visit another church, where the chains which bound St. Peter are kept."

"Can you resist such a programme?" said Lady Neville smiling. "I feel I must accept Mr. Rutland's kindness for you, if you will not do so for yourself."

The girl's eyes kindled as Duncan mentioned the places he intended to visit, and yielding to the impulse of the moment, she accepted.

Rutland had now been several weeks in Rome, and was becoming acquainted with the city. He had also been able to pick up a smattering of the language, and could read the Italian papers without much difficulty. Each day, moreover, he was understanding more and more, the spell which Rome casts upon all who really breathe her atmosphere. He felt the truth of the saying that no man can understand the history of civilisation until he has spent some time in Rome.

He was now sufficiently strong to bear a day's sight-seeing without being fatigued, and it was with a fast-beating heart that he took his seat beside Alizon on the following morning, and told the cabman to drive to St. John's Lateran. He felt that the gulf between himself and Alizon was deepening and widening. Rome was affecting him in many ways, and in spite of their being thrown together by Lady Neville's illness, he knew that Alizon was less frank with him than she had been during the first part of her stay in Rome.

Close to St. John's is a little church called Santa Scala, or the Church of the Sacred Steps. It is so named because it is ascended by a number of steps which St. Helena brought from Jerusalem. These steps, it was asserted, were those on which our Saviour trod when leaving Pilate's house.

When Duncan and Alizon arrived here they found Father Matthew awaiting them.

"This place is most interesting," said the priest. "Whoever goes up these steps has a thousand years' indulgence granted."

"I see there are two sets of steps up to the church," said Rutland.

"Ah, yes, but it is only these on the right by which you can gain the indulgence. Look at those people."

The sight was indeed interesting; for just before them were about thirty people going up the marble stairway on their knees. Some were stooping and kissing the cold stones.

"You see," went on the priest, "the only way to get the indulgence is to go up on your knees. Indeed, you are not allowed to ascend any other way."

"A thousand years," said Duncan, "is a long time."

"Yes, one of the Popes granted this great favour."

"Have you ever ascended them?" asked Rutland.

"No, I never have."

The young minister smiled, but he said nothing. Alizon looked at his face steadily, as if she wished to read his thoughts.

"Why do those poor people kiss the stones?" she asked.

"They are kissing the places where drops of blood fell from our Saviour," replied the priest. "It is very beautiful, isn't it? On certain days it is very crowded."

"I wonder it is not always crowded," said the girl; "that is——" but she did not finish the sentence.

"I suppose that arch-heretic Luther came here when he first visited Rome," said Father Matthew.

"Indeed," said Rutland. "Did he go up?"

"Yes; that is, he went up part way. Then—he came down again."

"I can quite believe it," laughed Rutland.

"He was always a doubter," said the priest sharply

"Are you not a doubter yourself?" asked Rutland.

"A doubter? Most certainly not! Why do you ask?"

"I was only thinking that if a thousand years' freedom from purgatorial flames were granted to you by such an act, that it is strange you have never taken advantage of it."

The young priest coloured, but did not answer.

"Would you like to walk up by the other steps and see the picture painted by St. Luke? It is a likeness of our Lord, and the chapel is called the Holy of Holies, and no one is allowed to officiate there but the Pope."

"What proof is there that the picture was painted by St. Luke?" asked Rutland.

"Oh, we have the tradition of the Church!"

"Nothing else?"

"We want nothing more."

"Let us see it by all means; that is, if you would like," and he turned to Alizon.

"Oh, yes," said the girl absently, "let us see it."

"I suppose you depend on the tradition of the Church also in proof that Christ ever trod those steps?" said Rutland, as they walked up a stairway close by.

"Yes. That is, St. Helena discovered them."

"But she lived three hundred years after Christ. How did she know that He walked on them?"

"I really have not studied the matter, but no doubt there is ample proof in the Church records."

"Just so." Rutland did not speak while they looked through a grating at a blurred piece of canvas, neither for that matter did Alizon. Both of them seemed thinking deeply.

When they left the little church a crowd of beggars

thronged around them, showing diseased and mutilated limbs, and soliciting alms.

"Let us get away!" cried Father Matthew. "It is a shame that these wretches are allowed around the church doors."

Alizon threw them a handful of small coins, however, and they entered the carriage.

"I am sorry I have not had time to gain a permission for a lady to enter that church yonder," and the priest pointed to a building which stood some little distance away.

"What is it?" asked Rutland.

"It is a monastery," said Father Matthew, "and ladies are not allowed to enter without a special permit. It is a pity, because a part of the true Cross is exhibited there, also one of the nails driven through the hand of our Lord."

"I am very sorry," said Rutland. "You would have liked to have seen it, wouldn't you?" and he turned to Alizon.

"Oh yes!" said the girl. "Of course you have proof that it is the true Cross!"

"Undoubted proof," said the priest. "After St. Helena was converted, she found three crosses one day, and she came to the conclusion that they were the crosses of Christ and the two thieves. Naturally she wished to discover which was the cross on which our Lord hung. Near by was a sick man, and she took these crosses to him. The man touched one of them, and he was made no better; he touched the second, and he was made rather worse; he touched the third, and he was made quite well. She concluded that this was the true Cross, and a part of it is in that church."

The girl was silent.

"On certain days," went on Father Matthew, "these relics

are exhibited and people are granted special indulgences. I am sorry you cannot see them to-day. I will, however, get permission to take you there. Meanwhile, we can go and see the chains which bound St. Peter."

A little later they came to an old church, in which were magnificently carved statues and many fine paintings; indeed, the churches of Rome have a wealth of art within them which may well make the rest of the world envious.

They went to a room beneath the altar, and there saw a piece of chain, which certainly did not look nearly two thousand years old.

"This is a very valuable relic," said the priest. "Fancy the chains which bound him to whom the Keys of the Church were given!"

"Yes, it is very interesting—if it *is* the very chain," said Rutland.

The priest laughed. "Oh, but you are a doubter, Mr. Rutland," he said. "You require as much proof as St. Thomas himself."

But Rutland did not reply. Instead, he found his way to what is perhaps one of the finest pieces of statuary of which the world can boast. It was the figure of Moses, carved by Michael Angelo.

"Do you know," said the young minister, turning to Alizon, "that when Michael Angelo had finished carving that magnificent figure, he tapped it with his chisel. Speak!" he cried."

"And no wonder," said Alizon. "It looks as though it could. The sculptor has conceived Moses grandly. He is prophet, warrior, statesman, and leader of men, all in one."

"You seem to think more of the figure of Moses than of St. Peter's chains," said the priest. "Ah, but it is lunch-time!"

In the afternoon they visited the dungeon where legend had it St. Peter was imprisoned. The priest told them that here St. Peter converted one of his gaolers, but he was in a dilemma, as there was no water with which to baptize him. But the Apostle struck the floor with his foot, and immediately water sprang up.

"Here is the well now," said the priest, lifting a cover, "It has existed ever since, and the water has healing power. Will you drink?"

Rutland drank, but Alizon refused.

"You see this mark here on this stone," went on Father Matthew. "One of the gaolers got angry with St. Peter and struck him. St. Peter's face fell against the stone, and the likeness is here now. Wonderful, isn't it?"

"Very," replied Rutland.

"I suppose you are wanting proof again," laughed the priest.

"I want proof that Peter was ever in Rome at all," said Rutland. "Honestly, I know of none. At any rate, if he ever was here the writers of the New Testament regarded it of such little importance that they never mentioned it."

"But we have history."

"What history?"

"The Church traditions."

"Oh, yes; but outside them."

"Well, really, I have never given the matter special attention?"

"But is it not a matter of vital importance?"

"Yes, it is, and doubtless proofs can be forthcoming, but I have not given attention to them. Shall we drive to the Trappist Monastery out beyond St. Paul's Church? St. Paul himself was beheaded there."

"Yes, by all means let us go," said Rutland.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW RUTLAND AND ALIZON SAW THE POPE OF ROME

THE rest of their experiences during the day need not be described in detail. Although they saw many sights, the true inwardness of everything was the same. They saw the church built on the spot where legend said that Peter saw Christ, and where the Apostle's death was foretold. They visited another shrine where Peter and Paul met and embraced, and they heard stories of the most wonderful nature. For not even Jerusalem itself can boast of as many legends as Rome. The Eternal City is the home of romance. Perhaps their most interesting visit was to the Trappist Monastery, where it is said Paul was beheaded. The old Trappist monk, who had a dispensation for the occasion, told them that when the headsman's axe fell the Apostle's head gave three leaps, and each time it fell a fountain of water burst forth. He showed them the three wells, and told them that the water was much in demand for the cure of diseases. When Rutland asked for evidence in support of the statement that St. Paul was beheaded there, and that his death was attended by such miraculous circumstances, the monk pointed to the wells of water. The proof, he said, that St. Paul's death caused the three fountains lay in the fact that they were there before them. For his part he wanted nothing more.

The second day's experiences were like unto those of the first. Objects of wonder appeared galore, miraculous stories were told freely, but historical proof was always wanting. To those who can believe on the authority of tradition, Rome is the home of wonders, the very Mecca of faith. But to those who ask for proof, it offers nothing. And yet the two days which Alizon and Rutland spent together in the company of the young priest were full of interest. Stripped of all the gew-gaws of superstition, Rome is still the cradle of history, the home of civilisation. More, the history of Roman Catholicism in Rome is the history of art, the history of the struggle of noble souls to find truth.

The stories told concerning many of the pictures might have no foundation in fact; but the pictures themselves might have been painted by the hands of angels. The wealth of the world has been poured into Rome, the genius of the world is represented there. Italy itself is a bankrupt nation, it shivers on the very verge of destruction, and yet there is stored in the churches sufficient wealth to lift from the country the incubus of its crushing debts. Its squares are triumphs of art, its statues are the highest expression of the sculptor's power. In many respects Rome is a disappointing city, but in its disappointments it arouses admiration, enthusiasm. Every inch of the ground on which it is built is historical; on its stones is written the story of the nations. The inwardness of Rome has yet to be unfolded. To the thinking man, the city is not helpful to faith—nay, its history has been the history of error and superstition; and yet the system which it represents must at one period have been the inspiration of the world. The atmosphere of the Papal capital is the atmosphere of mental disease and death, and yet every one must feel that in the zenith of its greatness it must have possessed a wondrous

life, and that at every beat of its mighty heart it sent its life-blood through the veins of the nations.

Every stone, every statue, every picture of Papal Rome tells of unrivalled devotion, of implicit faith, and of boundless enthusiasm. They speak of a nation which blindly obeyed, and which never thought of questioning priestly authority. But they also proclaim the fact of childish credulity, of black ignorance, and of mental poverty. It is a city of contrasts, mentally as well as materially. It tells how genius can for a time go hand in hand with ignorance, and that reason can even be friendly with baseless superstition.

The hand of death is on Papal Rome to-day, and its struggles are but feeble. It possesses but little intellectual or national power. True, many pay allegiance to it, but that allegiance is paid not because of what it is, but because of what it was. Step by step the Vatican is yielding to the Quirinal; day by day the papal chair is sinking, while the throne is rising.

Faith is no longer the keynote of the land. Atheism has lifted its scowling face, and although superstition shrieks out its anathemas, the hoarse shouts of unbelief grow louder, while the shrieks of a dying faith become more feeble and more despairing. The ignorant still believe, and the hand of the ages is still felt by a number of the people. But the hand is cold, and gives neither hope nor confidence. Papal Rome is regarded by a vast number of Romans simply as a system; it is not felt as a life. Gorgeous ceremonials still abound, all the old forms are still maintained, and many there are who do not see that Death has set his mark. But the mark is plainly to be seen.

Rutland felt all this during the next few days. The truth came to him slowly, but when it came there was no gain-saying it. Once or twice Alizon Neville accompanied him

on his journeys, but he said nothing to her concerning his thoughts.

After a time he seemed to grow restless. He gave up sight-seeing, and wandered aimlessly around the city.

"Are you not well to-day?" asked Lady Neville, as they sat down to lunch one morning.

"Oh yes, I am nearly as strong as ever. But I am thinking of leaving Rome," he replied.

"When?"

"Oh, in a day or so! I thought of going to Naples and Pompeii for a few days, and then of returning home by way of Assisi and Florence and Venice."

"But I have a great treat for you," said her ladyship, smiling.

"You are always kind to me," replied Rutland, "and I am at a loss to know in what way you can grant me further favours."

"I have had an interview with Cardinal Lostella this morning," said her ladyship. "He informs me that there is to be a great Papal function at the Sistine Chapel on Friday next, and he has secured tickets for Alizon and myself, and he told me that he would also reserve one for you if you cared to come with us."

"That is good of you!" cried Rutland. "I was talking with Father Matthew yesterday, and he was telling me that it would be extremely difficult for me to see the Pope. There was a great demand for tickets, he said, and as the chapel is so small, only a chosen few could be present."

"Well, we can be amongst the chosen few," replied her ladyship. "You will not, I am afraid, be able to have a seat in the chapel itself, but you will be able to stand in the passage, and watch while his Holiness is carried from the Vatican into the chapel, and also see him on his return after the function is over."

"I am favoured," cried Rutland. "I have wanted to see the Pope more than words can say. At first Father Rizzio thought he would be able to secure me a ticket, but lately he has been very dubious. But your acquaintance with Cardinal Lostella makes all the difference."

"I am sorry you cannot see the function itself," went on Lady Neville, "but Cardinal Lostella could obtain only one ticket for that, and he insists on giving it to me. So you will have to take care of Alizon."

"If she will trust herself to me, I shall be delighted," said Rutland.

The girl flushed slightly, and expressed her eagerness to witness the procession ; but she did not seem so pleased as Rutland expected she would be. Indeed, the young man realised with an aching heart that he was becoming more and more alienated from Alizon Neville. Her manner became more and more reserved, and her interest in his conversion seemed to have gone altogether. During the first few days of her stay in Rome she spoke often to him about the glories of the Catholic faith, and of the pain and poverty of those who stayed outside the fold of the Church ; but latterly she had adopted a different attitude. She appeared to regard his conversion as hopeless, and the fact had evidently made the gulf between them impassable.

When Friday came Rutland was excited beyond measure. He reflected that he would that day see the Pope, who was the spiritual king of two hundred and fifty millions of people ; he would behold the last of that long succession of men who had shaped the destinies of the nations. However groundless the claims of the Papacy might be, the sight would be of paramount interest. For Leo XIII. claimed to be the Vicar of Christ, the Vicegerent of the Almighty ; and there were thousands in Rome, and millions throughout the world, who conceded all he claimed. Even

although power was slipping from his hands, he retained its semblance, and the unthinking multitude did not distinguish between the two.

Having dressed himself in accordance with the instructions given, he accompanied Lady Neville and Alizon to St. Peter's, where a great crowd had gathered. There was something electric in the atmosphere. It seemed as though the dying embers of faith were being fanned into a flame in many hearts. The fact that they were going to see the Pope made men and women forget their doubts and their fears. Even the sight-seers who had gathered to see the favoured ones who possessed tickets of admission into the building, were evidently filled with enthusiasm. After all, human nature is the same all over the world. Mankind loves gorgeous spectacles, and there is a tendency on the part of the unthinking to regard the great ones of the world at their own estimate. Just as those who believe in a republican form of government will cry, "Long live the King!" or "Long live the Queen!" at the sight of a royal procession, even although they would in their calm moments vote for their dethronement, so there are many who have given up their faith in the Papacy, who will shout at the approach of the Pope.

On reaching St. Peter's, Lady Neville was conducted into the chapel, while Alizon and Rutland stayed in the corridor through which the Pope was to pass. It wanted more than an hour to the time before Leo XIII. would appear, but every inch of space was occupied. Through the influence of Cardinal Lostella, however, both Rutland and Alizon obtained a position close to the door of the chapel, where they could see everything very clearly.

"We are fortunate," said the young man.

"Yes, it is delightful," she answered, and Rutland saw

that her cheeks were flushed, and that her eyes flashed with excitement.

The great majority of the people in the corridor were women. Many of them were English Protestants, but they were devoured with curiosity. Seeing the Pope was to them the proper climax of their visit to Rome. They would have been just as excited if they were in a Mohammedan or Buddhist country, and were about to behold one of their spectacular displays. Others, on the contrary, were ardent Catholics. If their faith had been dying, it was now roused into life again. Some of them were weeping with very joy. Rutland marked the trembling lips and clenched hands of the people. For the time, at any rate, the vision of the Pope was as the vision of God Himself.

"I have longed all my life for this hour," he heard them say one to another. "Oh, to see him! to be close to him! to breathe the same air which he breathes!"

Nothing is more contagious than enthusiasm and excitement. It is like the spread of a fever, for the same laws obtain in the mental and physical world. Nothing of importance was said, and yet the enthusiasm grew. Men, who when they first came, were calm and almost indifferent, became infected with the atmosphere they breathed, and were as eager as the others. Rutland felt the same influence himself. Under the excitement of the moment he felt like saying with the others, "Long live the Pope-king!"

And yet the Pope had not appeared. Leo XIII. was noted for being late, and it might be an hour before he would pass by, but the thought that he *would* come, made him forget his early training and the study of years. He was possessed with the idea of the Papacy. The unreasoning faith of those around him made him feel the mystery, the majesty of Papal claims. For the moment it did not matter whether these claims had any foundation, the fact

that many around him believed in them made him forget to criticise. At that moment the chain of succession seemed unbroken, and in the eye of imagination he fancied it as a channel through which the life of God flowed. The thought was awe-inspiring. This man whom he would soon behold, possessed the keys of heaven. He had the power to bind and loose, to curse and bless! He was the manifestation of God on earth! All around him were those who believed it implicitly, and the wave of faith which covered the waiting throng covered him also.

Just as the multitudes in heathen lands have looked up to their wise men and witch-doctors, believing that they had power from the spirit-world, so did the eager, panting crowd regard the Pope as the mouthpiece of God!

The minutes passed slowly by, and the air grew hot almost to suffocation, but the excitement did not grow less, rather it increased until some of the women grew hysterical. Presently, however, there was a movement among the people, and the cry went up, "Here he comes! Here he comes!"

Rutland felt his heart beat faster, he knew not why, while Alizon grew pale to the lips.

The procession passed slowly along the corridor. It was evidently carefully arranged, but Rutland paid but little attention to the giant forms of the Swiss Guards, or the gorgeous attire of the domestic prelates, who preceded the Pope's *cortège*. He strained his eyes to see the one central figure in the procession, the one man he had so longed to see. He came in sight presently, and for a moment there was a great hush, like the hush of death, and then immediately after, a cry of gladness arose, as if Christ Himself had come back to earth.

Rutland saw him plainly; he was seated in a kind of chair, which was carried by strong hands. Around him was much gaudy drapery, and the old man was clothed with

costly white vestments. But the young man took no notice of all these ; his eyes were fixed on the features of the aged pontiff. For a moment a feeling of pity came into his heart. He was so weary, so frail, so thin, so weak. His face was as pale as death, his hands were almost transparent, he looked little more than a skeleton covered with dried parchment. He might have been dead but for his eyes ; they were black and piercing, and burnt with the fire of life.

He put out his hands feebly, as if in the act of blessing, while some of the people fell on their knees and sobbed hysterically, and others shouted with wild enthusiasm.

Why, he could not tell, but no sooner was the Pope carried near to the spot where Rutland stood, and he saw the little old man plainly, than all his excitement and enthusiasm departed. He seemed to see through the trapping, and beheld the heart of it all. The Pope struck no awe into his soul, he aroused no reverence. All around him the vast majority of the people knelt and sobbed and shouted ; but he stood quite still, he was utterly unmoved. He could no more kneel before that frail man, than he could kneel before an Indian idol. All his claims were the creations of an ignorant age, they were born in darkness, and they were dying in the growing light.

Just as the Pope's *cortège* arrived at the spot opposite where Rutland stood, the procession was delayed for a minute, so that the Pope remained near him for that space of time. So close was he that he could have touched him if he had stretched forth his hand ; indeed, some around him frantically reached forward that they might put their hands upon the chair which bore him.

How weary, how very weary, he looked, and so old, so painfully old ! He seemed to the young man as the symbol of a religion that was near its death, rather than the expression of that which would never die.

"*Santo Padre, Io impetro la vostra Santa Benedizione !*" sobbed the Italians.

"*J'implôre humblement votre sacré bénédiction sainte Père !*" cried the French.

"Bless me, bless me, Holy Father !" prayed the English.

The old man smiled. There is always something sweet in an old man's smile, especially if he be pure and good. Rutland's heart melted as he saw it. Why should he not kneel and receive the Pontiff's benediction? But he could not. Not because he did not desire the blessing, but because he could not kneel to a man who made claims to a power that he did not possess. He could pay him homage as a good old man, the head of a vast organisation, but he could not kneel to him as the only living successor of Peter. It was all a vain show, and the pretensions of the Popes had checked the march of civilisation, they had hindered the light of God, they had inspired bigotry and persecution, they had turned Europe into a field of carnage and bloodshed. No, he could not kneel, he could not ! It would be sacrilege, blasphemy !

The Pope lifted his frail hands again, and his keen, dark, penetrating eyes swept over the crowd. He saw Rutland, one of the few standing figures, he saw the look of unbelief in his eyes. He lifted his hand and spread three fingers over the crowd, and the procession passed into the chapel.

Still the people waited. The excitement had somewhat passed away, but none of them would leave until the Pontiff returned from the chapel. They had not to wait very long ; evidently the service was only brief. A little more than half an hour later he was again borne through the panting throng. This time, however, the old man paid but little heed to the shouts and sobs of the people. He was evidently worn out with the service within the chapel, and desired the quiet of his own apartments. Still he again

lifted his hands as if in the act of blessing, and then dropped them wearily. A few minutes later the door had closed, and the aged head of the Roman Church was hidden from their sight. At first there was a murmur among the people as of disappointment, but little by little the feeling passed away, and they prepared to depart. It was surprising how suddenly the interest of the gathering had ceased, surprising, too, how quickly the wave of emotion and religious enthusiasm departed. In a few minutes they were able to speak of the procession as a wonderful spectacle, and to express gratification at what they had seen.

"I wouldn't have missed it for anything," Rutland heard one woman say. (He had noticed that she had been hysterical a little while before.) "I don't think the Holy Father will last long, do you? Oh! I hope I shall be able to be present at the coronation of the new Pope! Who will it be, I wonder? Cardinal Lostella, perhaps."

"Yes," was the reply, "it was splendid. You Catholics can arrange processions far better than Protestants. It was very fine, but I don't believe much in it."

The crowd passed into the open air. They were able to gossip freely now, and to exchange views on what they had seen.

When Alizon and Rutland reached the square they waited for Lady Neville. Rutland's heart was as heavy as lead. He had during the last few minutes formed a great resolution. He looked at the girl by his side, she was subdued and did not seem inclined for conversation.

"When can I have a few minutes' private conversation with you?" he asked suddenly.

The girl looked up inquiringly.

"Oh, I must!" he cried, almost rudely. "I shall not keep you long. I wish to speak to you alone. It is most likely the last favour I shall ever ask of you."

"You wish to speak with me alone?" she repeated.

"Yes, on an important matter. What we have just seen has decided me."

Again the girl flashed an inquiring look.

"I shall be alone after dinner to-night," she said. "My mother has invited a lady to dine with us. They will be glad to dispense with me afterwards."

"At nine o'clock you will meet me in the hall, then?"

"Yes, if you wish."

Soon after Lady Neville joined them, and they drove back to the hotel together.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW ALIZON RECEIVED RUTLAND'S CONFESSION

"WHAT do you wish to say to me?"

They were standing alone beneath the trees which line the road leading to the Pincio. The night had turned cold, and not a single soul was in sight. A great gloom seemed to rest upon everything. Churches, squares, streets, were deserted; it looked like a city of the dead.

"I go to Naples to-morrow."

"So soon?"

"Yes. I cannot stay in Rome longer. I—I—well, I simply cannot, that is all."

There was a tremor in Rutland's voice as he spoke, and Alizon noted it. Perhaps she understood its meaning.

"I wished to be able to spend a few minutes with you alone before going," he continued.

Alizon was silent.

"You see," stammered the young man, "I came here to—to——; but you know. You held out a little hope to me when we were in Lancashire, just before I was taken ill. Not much, but a little. You hinted that if we were one in faith, if I could accept your creed, you might, great as is the distance between us, perhaps, in time, return my love."

"I remember," replied Alizon quietly.

"When I was struggling back to health, I determined to

come here, so that I might see your faith manifested at its head-quarters, and at its best. I made up my mind that I would look for the best, that I would endeavour to fasten on those things which might help me to believe."

"Well?" said the girl, and there was a tremor in her voice.

"I simply cannot, that is all; I simply cannot!"

"Cannot what?"

"Miss Neville, you know I love you. I have tried to kill my love, tried to forget you. But I cannot. I love you more and more. To win your love I would do anything, everything in my power. I have been tempted to be a liar, to—to stultify my conscience, that I might have a chance of winning you for my wife. But I cannot do it. I cannot confess what, to me, is a mockery. Perhaps it is my education, perhaps my temperament, but the Protestant faith is to me a great truth, while the distinguishing features of the Papacy are to me so many fables. And so, remembering your words, I—I must give you up."

"What words?"

"That you would rather die than be unfaithful to your Church, that you would destroy any love that stood between you and your religion. You remember, don't you?"

Alizon walked by his side with bowed head.

"Whatever illusions I might have had about the Papacy," continued Rutland, "have been dispelled here in Rome. To the man who loves truth, there is no rest for the sole of his foot. Forgive me, Miss Alizon, I am afraid I shall wound you, but I cannot help speaking plainly. All these beautiful stories which abound here, and which have been sanctioned by what is claimed to be an infallible Church, have to me no more foundation in fact than the story of Cinderella. In other words, your infallible Church is day by day bolstering up pretty myths, which were born of ignorance

and credulity. On every hand I find that the simple truths of the early Christians have been paganised by your Church; I find that the priests in order to retain the semblance of a power which was never theirs in reality, have all through the years, either consciously or unconsciously, been deceiving the ignorant concerning their rights."

"Have you the right to say this?" cried the girl. There was passion as well as pain in her voice.

"The right!" cried Duncan almost passionately. "Think of all these sacerdotal claims! What foundation is there for those claims either in history, in reason, or in the Scriptures? Apply any test you please, and the result is the same. Then take the claim that yours is an infallible Church. Either it is that, or it is a colossal deception. Its claim for power rests on that assumption. Infallible! Why, read its history for yourself. For fifteen hundred years it has been proclaiming aloud that its vaunted infallibility is a mere will-o'-th'-wisp, the veriest phantasmagoria that was ever foisted upon an ignorant community. As for the infallibility of the Popes, hedge it however you may by sophistical interpretations, it is just as vain, just as foolish. Here again it is simply a struggle for priestly power unsupported by reason, by history, by tangible evidence or divine mandate. Infallibility of Popes! Alexander VI., Julius II. the mouth-pieces of God! Paul V., a representative of Him who said, 'Suffer little children to come unto Me'!" The young man laughed bitterly.

"This Rome," he went on, "is the veriest Mecca of superstition. Think of it all, think of it, with its healing wells, its miracle-working images, its gaudy ceremonials. No wonder educated young Italy is leaving the Church wholesale. Why, you know that the restoration of her ladyship's health is attributed to the power of the Bambino! What evidence is there for the truth of it? The same evidence

that there *is* for the thousand and one other things. The whole thing crumbles in the light of common sense and at the very first touch of critical investigation.

"Besides, religion is transmuted into something poor and often childish. Salvation is obtained by little observances and childish credulity. Why, think of your *Santa Scala*. Fancy a thousand years' indulgence obtained by going up a few steps on one's knees! As though salvation was not something infinitely higher than all this.

"Forgive me, Miss Alizon, I am afraid I am speaking bitterly. I am like a man signing his own death-warrant. You have been reared in Papacy, and thus it is very dear to you, but I cannot help it, I must speak plainly. I go away into loneliness, and the sky of my life will be black; but I must be truthful. It is like pulling out one's heart-strings to give up all my hopes; but I felt I must speak plainly before bidding you goodbye for ever."

"Goodbye for ever?"

"Yes, for my own peace of mind I must never speak to you again after to-night. I shall not see you if I can help it. Seeing you is only deepening the old wound. Oh, you don't know how I love you, you don't know how hard it is to say what I have been saying."

For a few seconds there was a silence between them.

"Are you sure," said the girl presently, "that you have tested everything fairly—that is, from your standpoint?"

"All my life I have been more or less a student of Church history," answered Rutland, "but for a year I have been reading your side of the question, I have studied your writers, and have tried to understand their explanations. Since I have been here at Rome I have tried to see things from the Roman standpoint; but, oh, it is impossible, impossible! Take the New Testament on the one hand, and your faith on the other, and you can hardly find a

similarity between them ; the latter is only a caricature of the former, a travesty of the greatest truths God ever gave to men. I cannot help it, Miss Alizon, years ago I was a Protestant by education, now I am one by conviction, and God knows I would have given anything to have been convinced otherwise."

"Are you sure?" asked the girl, with a husky voice, "are you sure that you are drawn away from the Catholic faith, rather than towards it?"

"Oh yes, I am sure. If inclination were the most powerful factor in my mode of life, I would sink everything at once, and join you. But I cannot. It would be intellectual suicide. Reason forbids it, conscience forbids it, God forbids it. Whatever course others may take, for me it would be an unpardonable sin to stultify my best life at the altar of a played-out fallacy.

"Why, think," went on the young man, "I should by such an act make myself a slave. A few days ago I asked you to visit the American Episcopal Church in order to see those pictures by Burne-Jones. And you dared not go because it was a Protestant Church. While in Protestant England you are not absolutely forbidden to enter a Church of the reformed faith, here in Papal Rome such liberty is taken away. You are forbidden to read the best books in the world. Why, think of it, the other day I saw a list of writers whose works were placed on the Index. I saw the names of Descartes, whose writings are invaluable to a student of theistic philosophy, of Fénelon, of Malebranche, of Locke, of Mill, of Renan, of Edgar Quinet, of Edmund de Pressensé, as well as that of the pious Lamennais. Even Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* is regarded as a stumbling block to believers, and Lamartine is a forbidden author. You know what the Bishop of Tolisco told us some time ago. If the Catholic Church were powerful

again, he said, the Index would be enforced everywhere. Think of what it would mean! Why, the death-blow to knowledge would be struck, the advancement of learning would be a thing of the past, ignorance would be triumphant, and the nations would be composed of millions of slaves, who followed blindly at the heels of a power which forbade free investigation. No, no, Miss Alizon, I cannot help it, I cannot help it. When I came here I was filled with Ritzoom's idea of a great, united Church. That, too, has been dispelled. There is a kind of uniformity, but real unity is unknown. We of the Protestant Churches have far more real unity than you. The true Church is a spiritual kingdom, a great spiritual idea, a mighty spiritual life moulding the life of men. And in that spirit, in spite of the freest investigation, the Protestant Churches are united. We are bound by no arbitrary laws, we submit to no artificial rules and orders, but I have come to learn that the truest unity prevails among us, we are united to work and live for Christ's spiritual kingdom."

They had left the road which led to the Pincio, and had turned towards the Via Nazionale. Indeed, they had traversed the Via della Quattro Fontane, and had turned down the street past the Methodist Episcopal Church, which led to a square which was filled with evergreens, and which was beautified by great fountains of waters. They took no notice of the few pedestrians who passed them, indeed, as they entered the square they found themselves quite alone. The sky was cloudy and dark, but the electric lights revealed everything clearly. In the near distance in the Via Nazionale they heard the rush of traffic, but in the square all was silent save for the splash of the fountains.

"And is that all?" said Alizon presently. She spoke as if with an effort, and Rutland saw that her face was pale and that her eyes burned with an unnatural light.

"That is all I need say," replied Rutland. "I am grieved to have pained you, but I could not help speaking, could not help telling you why I am obliged to give up a hope which—which—but never mind. I have been living in a fool's paradise. Let us return."

"No," replied Alizon, "not for a few minutes. I am very tired. I will sit down on one of these seats."

She sat down like one weary, while Rutland stood by her side. Neither spoke a word for some time. Presently Alizon shivered.

"You are cold," cried Rutland anxiously. "Let us return."

Alizon arose in silence.

"What time do you leave to-morrow?" she said.

"I think there is a train somewhere between eight and nine," said Rutland. "I shall go by that."

"Then we must say goodbye to-night."

"Yes," replied the young man. "Perhaps I had better not speak to her ladyship, I will write her from Naples. I think you understand, don't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"It will be best, don't you think so?" The man's voice was hoarse. It was evident that his life was shaken to the centre. As he said, he was like one signing his own death-warrant, and yet he could not help speaking the words which, he felt, were destroying for ever the possibility of realising the desire of his heart.

She walked by his side around the square like one weary; but she did not speak.

"You are tired," said Rutland, "let me call a carriage."

"No," she replied, "let us walk around the square for a few minutes; it is quiet here, and it is not yet late."

There was apparently no feeling in her voice. At least Rutland thought so, and his heart became somewhat bitter.

"Haven't you a kind word to speak to me?" he said presently. "I suppose I am nothing to you, how can I be? But—but—— O God! Miss Alizon, help me to bear it."

"To bear what?"

"What! You know. My leaving you for ever may be nothing to you; but it is like death to me."

"Then why—why leave?"

"Why leave? Oh, don't mock me! You know what you told me. And—and really I cannot bear to—to be near you any longer, knowing that every breath I draw in your presence is strengthening a love which is hopeless."

The girl was silent. Presently, however, a new light shone in her eyes.

"You—you are sure what you say is true?" she said.

"What?"

"That you—you——"

"That I love you!" cried Duncan. "Oh, don't mock me! I cannot bear it. Why, you know that without you everything will be—but there, why should I repeat it? You know that I have given you my life, and that I cannot take it back."

"Then don't go to Naples to-morrow."

"Don't go to Naples to-morrow! Why?"

"Because, because—— Oh, Duncan, don't you know?"

CHAPTER XXIX

AFTERWARDS

ALIZON NEVILLE'S secret was out at last, she had told Rutland more than he had dared to hope for.

"Do you mean that?" he cried, "do you mean that you—you wish me to stay, that you—you——"

They were in the square alone beneath the olive trees, no prying eyes were near, no listening ears overheard the girl's confession.

Duncan caught her hands in his, and looked into her eyes. He had forgotten all about the differences in their faith, forgotten that she had been reared in a world different from his own. They were man and maid together, and they loved each other. At that moment neither realised what must inevitably lie before them, or even if they did, it did not blight their happiness. They feared nothing; anger, threats, persecution, were as nothing. In many respects the supreme moment of their lives had come, and everything save their love was forgotten. For let who will say otherwise, there is nothing, humanly speaking, so wondrous, or so great, as the joy of the man who knows that the love of his heart is returned. A few minutes before Duncan's sky was black, he saw nothing before him but a life of loneliness and disappointment. His life's work would have to be done under the shadow of unfulfilled

desires, and the cravings of his heart would never be satisfied. Now all was changed. Alizon loved him, and in that knowledge the world became new.

"You are sure?" he said presently, "you are quite sure? Tell me quickly. Your answer is everything to me."

"Yes," she said, and in her voice was a laugh and a sob. "I—I could not help it," she added.

A second later their lips met in their first kiss, and Duncan Rutland and Alizon Neville were betrothed.

For a time they were oblivious to everything save their own happiness. Had they been some village lad and lass wandering in a country lane, their love-making could not have been more simple, they could not have cared less for the eyes of the world. She was only a girl of twenty, and he a few years older. They forgot to be conventional as they whispered to each other the words that transformed the cold, dark night into a June morning.

Realities came back to them presently, however. The fact of their difference of faith came rushing back to the young man's memory. He remembered that she was a Catholic, and that she had regarded him as an enemy to the truth.

"You will forgive my being what you call a heretic?"

"You are not a heretic."

"Alizon!"

"Oh, I have been wanting to tell you for days past, only I dared not. It would seem as though—but you know."

"What do you mean, Alizon? Surely, surely——"

"It was no use. I held on as long as I could. Before I knew you I did not think, I simply accepted. I believed that to doubt was sin. I said in my heart that the greatest thinkers of the world had settled all these matters. That the Church was infallible, and that those who were outside its pale were outside salvation. I—I held to this while you

were in Lynford, and I came here hoping and believing that you would be converted. But, Duncan, sin or no sin, I cannot believe longer."

"Not in your Church?"

"No, it is impossible to me. I—I, oh, I cannot tell you all I've gone through since I have been here. I dared not speak to any one about it. I was afraid even to tell my mother. You see—I am afraid even you cannot understand."

"Yes, I think I can. But tell me, tell me everything."

"I don't know why, but I've been so disappointed since I came to Rome. The Church is not what I expected. Its ideals are so poor compared with what I hoped. It seemed to resolve everything into a system, and to support this system at whatever cost. And this, while I could not argue about it, fell short of my longings. But that which really made me begin to doubt was that—that Bambino."

"Yes, I understand."

"Oh, I cannot explain it. The priests and the nurse believed so implicitly, without any tangible evidence, just as they seemed to believe everything else. And then that night, after mother had fallen asleep, and you had left us, I went into the drawing-room, and that priest, Brother Francis, was lying on a sofa asleep. In spite of my anxiety, I almost laughed. And then I saw a New Testament lying on a table. As you know, it is a forbidden book to Catholics. That is, no Catholic is allowed to read it except under the supervision of the priest. I looked at it, and saw that it belonged to you."

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I read for hours. Perhaps you have wondered where the book was?"

"I thought I had lost it."

"I have had it ever since. I've read it through time

after time, praying for help and light. Oh, it is a wonderful book, and no one can realise what a revelation it has been to me."

"And that is all?"

"It is all that can be put into words, but I think you can understand."

That was the happiest night of Duncan Rutland's life. All, and more than he had ever hoped for had come to pass, the impossible had been realised. The fair girl who walked by his side had promised to be his wife.

"I must go and tell your mother, Alizon," he said presently.

"Yes—and—and you will not go to Naples to-morrow?"

"Not unless you will go with me."

The girl laughed a happy laugh.

They walked back towards the hotel together, along the Via della Quattrà Fontane, and down the steps past the tablet to the memory of Keats, into the Piazza di Spagna. The square was almost empty, and a great silence seemed to rest on the city.

"You remember the night we walked here together?" said Rutland.

"Yes, I remember."

"I can scarcely believe my own ears yet," said Rutland. "It seems impossible that the faith of many generations should have left you."

"I cannot understand it myself. I held to it as long as I could, I reminded myself of the penalties which would be imposed, I thought of what I had believed, but nothing mattered. I simply could not believe. Doubtless, there is much that is true, much that is beautiful in the system; but its claim to be the only Church, and an infallible Church, is simply absurd. And so—oh, Duncan, you don't know how I struggled, but it left me."

"And religion itself, Alizon, religion in the broader, grander sense of the word. What of that?"

"Christianity is become very much greater. I can see it everywhere now. It is not limited to the narrow channels in which some would confine it. I see its manifestations in all good thought, in all upward desire. I see it in its love for liberty, for justice; I see it even in the desire to be free from the restrictions of the creeds of men. It is now more than a sect, a community; it is a new spirit permeating the lives of men and women. I see its results in better books, better education, better governments, better everything."

"Yes, that's it."

"At first this was all vague. I could not conceive of a Church outside a historical and visible community. I thought it must have a visible head, and its official priesthood. Now all that has become the mere trappings of men, the inventions of men. You remember those words of Christ, 'The Kingdom of God cometh not by observation, for lo, the Kingdom of God is within you.' Well, I compared His words with all the teaching of Romanism, and—and, well, I cannot put my thoughts into words; but you can understand."

"You have told your mother nothing?"

"No, nothing. I have not dared."

"She will be very angry, will she not?"

"Duncan, you must help me. The Nevilles have been Catholics for hundreds of years, and mother is an implicit believer. Oh, I am afraid to think of what she will say."

"We will know to-night. I cannot bear the suspense."

"You are not afraid, are you?" Alizon asked the question with a little laugh.

"Not now," said the young fellow, looking at her with eager eyes.

"Because—because, there will not only be mother, but Father Sheen, and Father Ritzoom, and—and all the rest."

"I was not afraid of either of them when you were against me, Alizon—now I am afraid of nothing."

A few seconds later they reached the hotel.

"I am going straight to my room, Duncan," said Alizon.

"I expect Lady Ingram will have left before now. Mother will be waiting for me."

"Will you not speak to her to-night?"

"I—I don't know. I am such a coward."

"You a coward, Alizon?"

"Yes. If I were not I should go with you to—to speak to mother. Would you rather I did?"

"Not if it would pain you."

They walked along the corridor together towards Lady Neville's rooms.

"Good-night, Alizon."

Alizon was silent.

"Won't you say good-night to me?"

"Not yet."

"Why?"

"I won't be a coward, Duncan, I will go with you."

"No, don't. Your mother's anger will have spent itself after a little while, and—and I will take all the blame."

"Please don't help me to be a coward, Duncan," said the girl. "No, no, I must go with you."

There was such a look of determination in her face that he could not resist her; besides, the fact that she desired to stand by his side, and to share the brunt of her mother's anger, gave him joy untold. And yet he knew not what to do. He knew how loyal Lady Neville was to the faith of her fathers, knew how bitterly she would resent her daughter's desertion. He wished to save Alizon from words which he was sure would be spoken, longed to take

to himself everything which might wound her. And yet he reflected that he might help her, by being near her; and he longed more than words could tell to shield her from all pain. For himself he cared nothing. Since Alizon's declaration he felt that he could face anything. The thought of her love made impossibilities possible. Remembering the words she had spoken, he felt strong enough to brave the anger of not only Lady Neville, but of all the dignitaries of the Church as well.

"It is no use, Duncan," repeated Alizon, "I am going with you. I should never forgive myself if on the night of our—that is, if on this night of all others, I was afraid to stand by your side. You will let me come, won't you? I—I do so want to stay a little longer with you, you know!"

The wilfulness and the winsomeness expressed in the same breath, conquered the young man. Like all other lovers, he was but as clay in the hands of the potter. He knew that now, as always, the will of the girl by his side would be his also, and that she, because she loved him, would will for the best.

They entered side by side the room in which Lady Neville sat awaiting her daughter.

CHAPTER XXX

HOW LADY NEVILLE RECEIVED THE NEWS

LADY NEVILLE looked up from the book she had been reading with a smile on her face as her daughter entered. Then, as she saw Duncan, the smile changed to a look of questioning.

"Lady Ingram has just gone," she said quietly, "and I was wondering how long you would be. How are you, Mr. Rutland? It was a very imposing ceremony at St. Peter's to-day, wasn't it?"

"Very," replied Duncan.

"Did you get near His Holiness?"

"Oh yes, thank you. He stopped for a minute close to where I stood."

"Ah, that is well! There was such a crowd that I was afraid you would be unable to obtain a sight of him. He is a wonderful man, isn't he? Fancy such strength at ninety. He must be under an especial Providence; doubtless he is. Don't you think so?"

"I trust we are all under an especial Providence," replied Rutland; "but he is a very wonderful old man, very wonderful. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity of seeing him."

"Oh, that is all right! I hope it may continue to be a

source of satisfaction to you. Alizon, you look pale and tired, I think you had better retire."

"Lady Neville," said Rutland, "you must wonder why I have taken the liberty of calling to-night. If you will allow me, I will tell you in a few words."

"By all means." She looked into his face as though she expected a pleasant communication.

"I have come to tell you that I love your daughter, and to ask your consent for her to become my wife."

Lady Neville looked at him with speechless astonishment.

"I do not quite understand you, I am afraid," she said presently.

"I love Alizon," he repeated simply. "I have loved her for nearly a year now."

"You love Alizon!"

"Yes, Lady Neville."

"And—and you have told her this?"

"Yes, I have told her."

"And she? You, Alizon?"

"She has made me a happy man, perhaps the happiest man in the world." His voice was husky, and he spoke quietly, almost reverently.

"When did she tell you this?"

"To-night."

Lady Neville rose to her feet, her eyes flashed with anger. Rutland would not have been surprised if she had bidden him leave the room.

"Alizon," she said presently, "will you leave us? Mr. Rutland and I had better speak of this matter alone."

"I would rather not, mother."

"What do you mean?"

"Only this,"—Alizon's face was very pale, and her lips were tremulous, but she mastered herself and spoke quietly

"You will accuse Duncan of things which he will not deny, and which will not be true; you will say what you ought not to say to him—and—and I wish to stay."

Lady Neville was evidently very angry. She toyed impatiently with some trifles on the table by her side, and seemed in doubt as to what she should say next.

"Do you think you have acted honourably with me, Mr. Rutland?" she asked presently.

Rutland was silent; he was afraid at that moment that he ought to have told Lady Neville of his love months before.

"Is—is this your return for the—the kindness I—I have tried to show you?" she continued. Had she not been very angry she would never have spoken in this fashion; but under the circumstances she could barely govern her words.

"Perhaps I ought to have spoken to you before," replied Rutland. "Possibly I ought to have told you on the night I discovered my love. But in those days it seemed pure madness on my part to lift my eyes to Alizon."

"It is still," replied her ladyship. "That, of course, must be understood."

"I know it, and yet I cannot help it," was Rutland's response.

"Will you tell me the history of this foolishness?" said her ladyship presently. "Perhaps when I know that, I can show you how—how utterly impossible it is for me to countenance the affair."

"I am afraid its history is my own history after I came to Lynford," replied Duncan. "You know how I was thrown into contact with Alizon, and—and I could not help loving her."

The young fellow said this so humbly, yet so manfully, that for a moment her ladyship felt less bitterly towards him. Perhaps she thought of the time when her own heart

first warmed towards Sir Charles Neville, and the memory of that time made her young again.

"And how long is it since you first spoke to Alizon about this foolishness?" she asked.

"It is some months ago."

"And why did you not tell me?" asked Lady Neville, turning towards her daughter.

"Because," and Alizon spoke steadily, "because I hoped then that Duncan's love was only a passing fancy. It was altogether strange to me, and it seemed so impossible that I could not entertain it seriously. Besides, I did not tell you because I thought if you knew, you would forbid his coming to the Priory."

"Certainly I should, and what then?"

Alizon was silent, she did not know how to express her thoughts. Lady Neville, however, interpreted her silence rightly, and for a moment the position staggered her. Here was surely a strange outcome to her plans for the young minister's conversion. How blind she had been never to have thought of this contingency! She remembered that she had invited Rutland to the Priory, had remonstrated with him when he failed to take advantage of her invitations.

"Tell me the whole truth," she said angrily. "Was it at your wish that my daughter did not tell me of your madness?"

"It was not," cried Alizon. "I—I thought he would forget it, and it was I who suggested that his words should be regarded as not spoken. Duncan never hinted at such a thing."

The girl seemed to take a pride in taking all possible blame on herself; it was for this reason that she had insisted on taking her place by his side during the interview.

"But did you give no encouragement when he first spoke?"

"No," said Duncan; "none at all. She told me that even if she could ever care for me, she would destroy all possibility of affection while I remained a Protestant."

A sneer curled her ladyship's lip. She thought she saw how matters stood, and she despised the young minister accordingly. Still, it might be for the best; the man who could change his faith in order to win a girl would not be difficult to deal with. Some sort of compromise could be effected somehow. Besides, if he professed conversion to the Catholic faith he would be under the discipline of the Church. The whole affair was terribly disappointing, but it might be all for the best. Immediately she became more cool and collected, she was able to talk with more deliberation.

"Well, and so I suppose you began to be drawn to our faith?"

There was a touch of scorn in her voice, for she was a high-souled woman. Faith to her was a sacred thing, and she could not conceive how any one could associate base considerations with matters of religion.

"No, I do not know that I was drawn to it," replied Rutland; "but I loved Alizon so much that I said I would study the whole ground again, that I would read Catholic books, and understand Catholic arguments."

"Yes, well?"

"As you know, I did not visit the Priory for months. I dared not, I—I was not strong enough. I tried to destroy my love for Alizon, but I could not."

"No, I suppose not." Lady Neville felt sure she knew what was coming, and began to form plans whereby she could deal with the whole business.

"I need not say what I endured. I tried to be faithful to my Church, I tried to do my duty by all. Then I was taken ill."

At that moment Lady Neville felt that perhaps his mental struggle was real. The doctor had declared that the young minister had nearly killed himself by overwork and anxiety. Besides, his voice had a ring of truth. Doubtless, then, he was telling what had actually taken place, and thus his conversion was real. It was as she had hoped, with the exception of his madness in loving Alizon. The case would be difficult to deal with, still it could be dealt with. She wished that Ritzoom were in Rome, he would be able to advise with her. Well, and why not? A telegram would reach him in a few hours, and in three days he could be in Rome, meanwhile the matter could be left in abeyance.

"Yes, you were taken ill," said her ladyship, "but you recovered. What then?"

"I reflected that I had never seen Romanism at its headquarters," said Rutland; "that although books had failed to convince me, the sight of Rome, the home of the Vatican, and the centre of the system would do so. For, for I am afraid I wanted to be converted. You see I loved——"

"Yes, yes. Well, you came to Rome. And I suppose the work of the Church, her services, her history, and a sight of the Holy Father did convince you?"

"No," replied Rutland quietly, "no they did not convince me."

"What! do you mean that—that——"

"I am still a Protestant, Lady Neville. I am more convinced in my opinions than ever."

Lady Neville was staggered. Her castle of cards had fallen to the ground; with one blow all her plans were destroyed.

"Then how dare you as a Protestant, as a heretic, speak to my daughter again?" she asked angrily. "I

trusted you as a gentleman. For that reason I consented to her accompanying you on some of your journeys. Is this your idea of acting as a man of honour?"

Alizon opened her mouth to speak, but Rutland stopped her.

"I did not betray your trust," replied the young man. "As you know, Father Matthew accompanied us in all our journeys, and neither by word nor sign did I act other than as an acquaintance to whom you had been kind."

"Then to what circumstance do I owe the honour of this visit to-night?"

"It was my fault," said Alizon proudly. "I *will* speak,"—this to Duncan, who tried to answer Lady Neville's question. "This morning after our visit to the Sistine Chapel he asked me to grant him an interview; and knowing that you would be engaged with Lady Ingram, I told him that I would give it him to-night."

"I begin to see," said Lady Neville. "But may I ask the subject of discussion?"

"He told me that he was going to Naples to-morrow," cried Alizon excitedly, "he told me that—that he dare not, that is he could not be in my society any longer."

"It was my fault," cried Rutland. "I had tried to accept your faith; but I could not. I remembered that Alizon had told me that even if she felt any love for a Protestant, she should feel it her duty to destroy it, and so I gave up all hope of ever winning her. And—and I could not bear being in her company, because I was consumed with a hopeless love, so I made up my mind to go to Naples. I know I was wrong—that is, perhaps I ought to have gone away without speaking to her; but I could not help it. So I—I told her that I must remain what I have been because—because I could not accept your faith, and that I must never see her again."

Rutland got out this speech stammeringly, and with great difficulty. He scarce knew what he was saying, but in his heart was a great desire to take all blame upon himself. In his excitement, however, he uttered words which had better have been left unsaid.

"I see," said Lady Neville, "you told Alizon that you must bid her goodbye for ever. Very proper, and very romantic. But why do you come here? Why this mad confession and this more than mad request? Why have you not gone to Naples?"

"Because I asked him not to go," cried Alizon.

Her face was very pale, but her eyes burned brightly. In them was an expression of determination which told her mother that she was not to be turned aside from her purpose. As she spoke, moreover, she looked up into Duncan's face, and the look made Duncan's heart warm with joy, and strong with resolution.

He was proud beyond words of her declaration, and yet he wanted to shield her, wanted to take the brunt of her mother's anger upon himself. And so he spoke wildly, unheedingly.

"It is all my fault," he cried, "I—I should have acted otherwise; but——"

"It was not his fault," cried Alizon proudly, "I asked him to stay, because I could not help it. He loved me, and has loved me for a long time; and I love him, and I could not bear for him to go away."

"Alizon!" cried Lady Neville.

"Oh, I am grieved to cause you pain," cried the girl, "and, oh, mother, I don't love you the less; but surely you can understand, surely you can feel for me. I cannot help it!"

For a moment Lady Neville's eyes grew soft, and she seemed like yielding to the pleading of her only child; but

only for a moment. Anger and disappointment steeled her heart again, and she spoke almost harshly. Besides, she did not know the whole of the truth yet. What she had heard was but the preamble of what to her was almost as cruel as death itself.

"No, I cannot understand," she said bitterly. "How *can* I understand? Can you not see the madness of your request, the mockery of your position? How can you love a man who does not belong to your station in life, and who is—but why need I repeat it all? You feel this, Mr. Rutland, you can understand the impossibility of—of everything you ask?"

"No," cried Rutland. "I know I am your inferior in worldly position. I do not belong to a great historical family; but—but God has made us fit for each other. And—and I love her like my own life!"

"Love!" sneered Lady Neville.

"Yes, I love her," cried Duncan. "I do not profess any other worthiness than this. She is all the world to me. I know I am a poor man, but—I am not a clown."

There was a touch of pride in his tone. Alizon's love had made him bold, besides, he knew that intellectually he was Lady Neville's equal, and he prided himself upon being a gentleman.

Perhaps her ladyship felt this as she looked at him. True he did not belong to any of the families who might claim to be her equal, and he had not the bearing of a society man, but he looked what he was, a manly man. He had thrown aside his overcoat, and stood in evening dress by Alizon's side. There was nothing small nor weak about him. Both face and form were well moulded. His eyes shone clear and bright, and his words, though spoken under the influence of a great excitement, were those of a man of feeling—a man with the instincts of a gentleman.

Even as he stood there, she thought of Arthur Stanley who had sued again and again for Alizon's hand, and to whom she had leant a comparatively willing ear. She mentally compared the two men, physically, intellectually, morally, and she had to admit to herself that in all the truest essentials of manhood Stanley was by far inferior to Rutland. Place them side by side in the best of society, and Rutland would attract attention, while the other would be ignored. Rutland would claim respect for his intellectual ability, and for his learning, while Stanley would be regarded as a heavy-headed country squire. She had to admit, too, that the young minister's ideals concerning life were far higher than those of the other. Thus he was far more fitted for a husband for her daughter. She had respected Rutland even when he was Father Sheen's opponent in debate; after she had invited him to the Priory she regarded him still more highly. She had learnt to regard social position at its proper value, and because she was a high-souled woman she realised wherein true aristocracy lay. But this was while she thought of Rutland as simply a possible valuable convert to the faith she loved. Besides, her somewhat advanced social ideas were largely a matter of theory. She had never contemplated putting them into practice in a way that would closely touch her own family life. Admitting Rutland to her house as an interesting and gentlemanly young Protestant who might be converted to the Catholic faith was one thing, considering him as a possible husband for her daughter was another, and so it was impossible to seriously consider the proposal he had made, even although Alizon had yielded to a love that was madness.

"I do not say you are a clown, Mr. Rutland," she said quietly. "But what you ask is impossible, impossible!"

"Why?" asked Rutland.

"There are many reasons why, any one of which would be sufficiently strong to keep me from granting my consent. But I will give one, the one you have felt yourself. You are a Protestant."

"Yes, I am a Protestant," replied Rutland quietly, "but I am sincere in my faith."

"Yes, but Alizon is a Catholic, and while I respect you personally, that is, I have respected you in the past, I could never consent for Alizon to marry a—that is, a man of different faith."

"But, but——" stammered Rutland, and then he stopped. He knew that the revelation which hung upon his lips would be harder to bear, even than the confession of Alizon's love for him.

He tried to speak again, but before his words formulated themselves into a sentence, Alizon fell on her knees at her mother's feet.

"Mother, mother," she sobbed, "forgive me, but I have been obliged to give up my old faith."

CHAPTER XXXI

DUNCAN'S FIRST LOVE-LETTER

A T first Lady Neville could not believe her daughter's words. The confession was absurd, because, to her, it could not be true.

"My child, you have taken leave of your senses," she said. "You are not well. My illness has been too much for you. We will go away from here; we will go back to England."

"No, no, mother," cried the girl, "I am not ill, I am not speaking without thought. It is true, mother, it is true. I believed as long as I could; but—but I cannot believe longer."

Lady Neville was no longer able to control her feelings. Her daughter's words entirely unnerved her, for a moment she was overcome by her confusion.

"And this is your work, I suppose," she cried bitterly, turning to Rutland, "this is your idea of honour. Not content with disturbing our town with your pernicious doctrines, you seek to pour poison into my child's mind. This is baseness personified."

Alizon sprang to her feet before Rutland could reply. Her mother's words made her feel less sensitive to the pain she had given her.

"It is false, mother," she replied. "Duncan has never

uttered one word to persuade me to change my faith. Never breathed a wish, in my hearing, that I should cease to be a Catholic."

"Then why this madness, why this treason to the faith which not only the Nevilles, but the Bartons, have held for hundreds of years?"

"I cannot give you many reasons, mother, except that I find it impossible to believe. Until that discussion I believed without question. I had been taught to regard all non-Catholics as heretics, and I never for a moment doubted the absolute truth of all the claims of the Church. Even when Father Sheen failed to deal with the difficulties which Duncan raised at the discussion, I did not doubt. I felt sure that everything was right, although I could not understand. I did not feel a bit influenced by what he said in his speeches, although he seemed certain of the things he spoke about. As you know, mother, it was your wish that he should be converted, and——"

"This has nothing to do with your madness," cried Lady Neville, interrupting her. For the first time she realised that she had been guilty of trying to do that for which she censured Rutland in such unmeasured terms. The thought made her uncomfortable, for she felt she had deliberately become a party to a plot, the purpose of which was to make the young minister stand up in the Industrial Hall and declare his belief in Popish doctrines. There seemed nothing wrong about this, nay, rather, it was a deed which, had it been successful, would have gained her the smile of her Church. But when she fancied that Rutland had tried to convert her daughter to Protestantism, she felt indignant beyond words. Still, she reflected that in winning a Protestant to Catholicism she was snatching a brand from the burning, while when a Protestant perverted a Catholic, he was dragging a soul to perdition. Although this might

be true, however, she shrunk from letting Rutland know that his conversion had been deliberately planned, and thus she stopped Alizon, who was going so dangerously near to making the confession.

"This has nothing to do with your madness," she repeated angrily; "what made you give up your salvation and become the child of lies?"

"I have not given up salvation," replied the girl, "rather I have realised it. I have come to see that it is not to be obtained by penances and confessions and repeating prayers, and——"

"Silence!" cried her ladyship sternly. "I will not have you utter such blasphemy. Who taught you to say these things? What led you to this heresy?"

"I could not help it, mother, I really could not," replied the girl. "What really opened my eyes, and led me to doubt was—that Bambino, to which your restoration to health has been attributed."

"That is only a venerated relic, child," said her ladyship. "Belief in its power has not become an article of faith."

"But it has been venerated by the Church, it has been declared to have miraculous power, and this by the Pope's consent. The priest attributed your recovery to its influence."

"Well, and why not?"

"Because there was not a shadow of evidence. It had no more to do with your recovery than any doll I might buy in a shop!" cried the girl.

"Well, and what then? Suppose it had not, surely there was not enough in such a trifling incident to lead you to change your faith."

"Not in itself. But it led me to consider other things. It led me to examine the evidences on which the supposed vital doctrines were built, and I saw that in many cases they

were mere legend, mere fable, bolstered up by the authority of the Church."

"And where had you the opportunity of examining evidences, you foolish child?"

"I found a New Testament, I read it through, and I found that many of the doctrines in which I believed had no foundation there, and compared with the teaching of Christ, that of the Church seemed so poor, so trivial."

"How dare you! How can you, an ignorant girl, understand these things? Besides, the Church has expressly forbidden you to judge of such matters."

"And why should I not?" asked Alizon. "I have my life to live, and God has given me some intelligence; besides, I have prayed many hours, and God has opened my eyes. I cannot help it, mother, neither can I altogether explain how it came to be; but many of my old beliefs left me, just as my belief in the story of Cinderella left me. In some things I still believe. The doctrines which are common to all Christians are real; but those on which the Papacy rests are to me unbelievable. I cannot, *cannot* accept them. Why, this Rome, this Mecca of the Church, is the very home of superstition, of baseless legend, of Pagan relics. Why, even the ceremony we saw to-day has no suggestion of the Christianity of the New Testament. Oh, I held on as long as I could, I struggled and prayed to keep on believing, but I could not, mother, I could not!"

The girl's overtaxed nerves gave way, and she burst into passionate sobs, while Lady Neville stood by in speechless anger.

"Mr. Rutland, I wish to be alone with my daughter," she said presently. "When you are gone, I shall doubtless be able to bring her to reason."

"Of course I will go since you bid me," said Rutland. "But, but——"

"I have given you my answer—it is impossible, it is madness. You will be wise, you will be kind to both Alizon and me, if you adhere to your former resolution to go to Naples to-morrow."

"No," said Rutland, "I shall not go."

"And why, pray?"

"Because Alizon claims my protection."

"Your protection. Against whom, pray?"

"Against you, and those you will select as your advisers," replied Rutland quietly.

"I think I told you I desired to be alone," said her ladyship presently. "It is not for me to answer you."

"Then I must go." He took a step towards Alizon.

"I forbid you to go near my daughter," said her ladyship. "Kindly go."

"Thank you, your ladyship. Good-night, Alizon. Remember I shall always try to be near you, and that I shall be always loving you."

He left the room, leaving mother and daughter together.

The next morning when Rutland went into the breakfast-room of the hotel, he looked everywhere for Lady Neville and Alizon, but they were nowhere to be seen. After breakfast he wandered for a long time round the corridors in the hope of catching a glimpse of them, but in vain. He was not at all surprised at this, however, as he knew that Lady Neville would do her utmost to keep Alizon out of his sight. He had spent an almost sleepless night thinking of what had taken place after his departure, and in wondering how Alizon fared, and when, at last, he fell asleep his dreams were haunted by unpleasant memories of the scene through which he had passed. Still, the fact remained that Alizon loved him, and that made all things bright, and he comforted himself with the thought that her mother loved her too tenderly to continue to be unkind.

When noon came, and neither had appeared, however, he felt more anxious. Was Alizon ill, or had Lady Neville suffered a relapse? Although he had been tempted to go to her ladyship's rooms and inquire, he had up to now refrained from doing so. As the hours passed by, however, and he could see nothing of them, he at length made up his mind to personally discover if all were well. He had scarcely reached the landing on which Lady Neville's suite of rooms was situated, than he saw servants flitting about as though something of importance had taken place. A few minutes later he discovered the reason for this. The rooms had been vacated, and the servants were preparing for the incoming guests.

Utilising his small knowledge of Italian, he asked a servant for information. The only answer he was able to obtain was that the Countess had vacated the apartments. The woman knew nothing else, however, and as Rutland had a difficulty in understanding her, he made his way to the entrance hall. The concierge spoke English fairly fluently, as, indeed, he seemed to speak all other languages.

Yes, the lady, whom he persisted in calling "the Countess," left the hotel that morning.

"At what time did she go?" asked Rutland.

"Soon after eight o'clock."

"Where did she go? Have they left Rome?"

"I do not know where they are gone; except that they have left Rome."

"But she left instructions concerning her letters?"

"Certainly."

"She gave you an address to which you should forward them?"

"Certainly."

"What is the address?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you, signore, but you must please excuse me," said the Italian.

Rutland was nonplussed. During the afternoon he made as many inquiries as he dared, but he gained no information as to where Alizon had been taken. He was comforted by the thought that neither of them could be ill, or they would not have left the city; but as may be imagined, his mind was torn with anxiety.

"They are gone back to England," he concluded at length. "Lady Neville has taken Alizon home that she may get the advice of Ritzoom and Sheen."

But he had no sufficient reason for believing in this, as he knew that Lady Neville was not sufficiently strong to bear continuous travelling.

He felt he could not stay longer in Rome. Now that Alizon had gone the city had lost its charm.

"Yes, that is it," he said at length. "Alizon has gone to England, and I will go too. I will catch the midnight train to-night, and return as fast as I can. I shall then be near to help her."

He walked into the Piazza del Popolo, then along the Corso, and presently returned by way of the Via Condotti. When he reached the hotel, he realised that he was not strong enough to take the journey to England. The experiences of the last twenty-four hours revealed to him the fact that he had not yet recovered his strength. He was sick and faint. He went to his room and threw himself on his bed. For a time he thought he was going to faint; but presently he recovered himself. The first dinner-bell rang, and he rose and dressed.

"I think I will try and go after all," he said presently. "I feel much stronger now; besides, I want to be on the move. I cannot stay in Rome now Alizon is gone."

When he reached the smoking-room, he saw men reading

letters. Evidently the evening post had come. He did not expect any himself, but he mechanically made his way to the entrance hall where the letter-rack was placed. Turning to the space containing the number of his room, he saw that several had arrived for him. He scanned them eagerly, in the hope that Alizon had been able to send him a line, but he saw at a glance that they were all from England.

"I will not read them until after dinner," he thought, as the second dinner-bell rang. "Perhaps they will help to distract my mind." When dinner was over he found his way into the billiard-room, which was quite deserted. There was only one letter of importance, and that was from the Tudor Church secretary. It contained the news that the pulpit had been supplied for four Sundays more, and while the Church longed for his return, the officers had forwarded the next quarter's salary, with a resolution, unanimously passed, that he must not come back until he was perfectly restored to health.

The letter decided him. "No, I'll not go back yet," he said; "besides, Alizon may be in Italy. I'll follow Lady Neville's advice and go to Naples. I promised myself that I would see Pompeii and Vesuvius before returning to England."

By two o'clock the next day he had reached the capital of Neapolia, and was, from his hotel windows, looking at the finest bay in the world.

The change did him good; new scenes, new associations added to the sight and sound of the sea, helped him in spite of himself. Besides, the consciousness that Alizon loved him made the impossible seem easy; with that thought to cheer him he could not despair.

He did not like Naples, however. True, the situation of the town was very fine, while the bay deserved all the

praise it had received ; but the life of the city was abhorrent. The commonest decencies of life were not observed, filth prevailed almost everywhere, and of self-respect the people seemed to be deprived.

"Surely this is the home of superstition, lying, cheating, dirt, and devilry," he said, after he had been there three days.

Still he enjoyed his visit to Pompeii, and wandered among its ruins like one in a dream. During the hours he was there it seemed as though long centuries had never been, and that he was living in the far back past, when gay chariots swept through the narrow streets of that wonderful city. Vesuvius, too, inspired him with awe. That great sea of fire, burning in the heart of the mountain impressed him, as it must impress all who see it. It aroused his imagination, and made him realise the cry of the people of Pompeii when they saw the burning lava sweeping down the mountain-side—"The end of the world is come! The end of the world is come!"

At the end of four days, however, he wanted to be on the move again. His mind was racked with anxiety about Alizon ; he fancied all sorts of gloomy pictures, and called to mind stories describing what Catholic girls had often suffered when they discarded the faith of their fathers.

On the morning of the fifth day in Naples, however, a letter was brought to his rooms which made all things new. It was a letter from Alizon which had been forwarded from Rome. It was the first letter he had ever received from her, and he broke the seal with all the eagerness of a boy of fifteen.

It was sent from Florence, and was evidently written in haste, but it contained words which made the young man's heart beat for very joy, and made every fibre of his being pulsate with exquisite gladness. It revealed traits in

Alizon's character of which he had no conception ; it told of a thoughtfulness and tenderness which he had never attributed to her.

"I have a great difficulty in writing you, Duncan," she said, "for every one seems against me, even my maid. But still, I do not mind ; I am very happy, happier than I ever hoped to be in this life ; perhaps it is because I still have hope of a greater happiness in the future. As you will know ere this, we left Rome suddenly ; my mother willed that we should, and I thought it best not to refuse to accompany her. She is far from strong, and my action has hurt her more than you can think. We shall not stay here long. Where we shall go I do not know, but probably to Venice. You can guess the reason why I am kept in ignorance. It seems very strange that mother and I, who have been such friends, should be opposed to each other ; but I cannot help it. I am trying to be kind and patient and cheerful, although it is difficult to do so. Mother thinks it wise to taunt me because I have ceased to be a Catholic, and to accuse me of being a traitor to the truth. It is what I should have done under similar circumstances a few months ago, so I must not complain. She also continues to be angry because of you, but I brave that anger gladly, for through you life is more glorious than I had ever conceived that it could be.

"Mother will, I am sure, never consent for us to be more to each other than we are now ; but even if we are not, I shall continue to rejoice.

"I think of you continually. Do not be anxious about me, nor let yourself be unhappy, for your happiness is more to me than my own. I wish I could ask you to write, but I cannot ; neither must you expect another letter from me, for I am afraid I shall not have another opportunity of writing.

"Mother is surrounding me with priests, learned and grave, in the hopes of leading me back to her faith ; she is also trying to make me believe that my love for you is madness. But she fails in both these things—fails because 'I know in whom I have believed'—fails, because—but you know, Duncan."

That same day Duncan started for Florence, where he stayed for two or three days ; and after making sure that Alizon had left that city, he took train for Venice. His mind was full of anxious thoughts ; but as he read and re-read Alizon's letter, he could not help rejoicing with great joy.

CHAPTER XXXII

FATHER RITZOOM DELIBERATES

"WELL, what is the meaning of this, Sheen?"

It was Father Ritzoom who spoke, and the old parish priest noticed that the Jesuit was both anxious and angry. They were sitting together in the study of the former, in Lynford, and both were burning the fragrant weed.

"You know as much as I do now," replied Father Sheen. "Lady Neville sent for me as soon as she arrived, the day before yesterday, and on hearing her news, I immediately telegraphed for you."

"I've been a fool," said Ritzoom presently.

"Most wise men become fools sometimes," replied Father Sheen.

"But my foolishness is inexcusable. If I were a boy just completing his novitiate I could not have muddled the business more."

"I thought it a splendid plan."

"So it was, but I reckoned wrongly. I forgot that women live outside the realm of any known law, and I did not realise that Rutland's prejudices were so deeply rooted."

"Of course, it was my fault in the first instance," said Father Sheen ruefully; "but for my giving that series of addresses all this would never have happened."

"There's no knowing," said Ritzoom.

"No, of course that is so, and really, when I understood your plans, I thought that Providence had interfered, and would overrule everything for the glory of the Church."

Ritzoom sat quietly for several minutes, his face looking more like a mask than the features of a living man.

"Put on some more coals, Sheen," he said presently. "It may be the end of April, but the nights are cold."

The old priest obeyed without a word, looking anxiously at the Jesuit's face as he did so. Father Sheen had great faith in Ritzoom's judgment, but the results of the scheme which he had formulated, had staggered that faith. As we have seen the old priest was not a clever man, and he saw no loophole of escape out of the business which brought them together.

"Did you see Alizon?" asked Ritzoom presently.

"Oh yes."

"Well?"

"Oh, she was very kind to me, but I saw that all my authority had gone."

"You never had much, I am afraid."

"Well, there was always an atmosphere of liberty in the house, but I never knew a time when she would disobey me in matters of religion."

"Did you say anything to her about Rutland?"

"No. I—I, somehow I dared not."

"And did you speak to her about her change of faith?"

"No, I did not think it best, then."

Ritzoom laughed quietly. He read this good, simple-minded priest's thoughts like a book.

"You were wise."

"What are you going to do?" asked Father Sheen, after several minutes' silence.

"I am trying to think. Give me another cigar!"

The Jesuit smoked for several minutes in perfect silence. His face was utterly expressionless, his eyes were closed.

"Well?" said Sheen presently.

"It's not well, it's bad."

"Yes, it is bad. I see no loophole anywhere. Even although her ladyship persists in her refusal——"

"Which she will."

"Yes; well, even if Alizon disobeys her mother——"

"Which she will not."

"I don't know."

"I believe you."

"Well, come now, what do you suggest? Let's face the facts."

"That's what I've been doing ever since I entered this beastly town."

There could be no doubt about it, Ritzoom was very angry. His impatient, curt replies to his friend, the rasping tone of his voice revealed the fact continually.

"Sheen, as you know, I've been engaged on delicate matters for more than twenty years. During that time I've failed only twice to carry out my plans."

"I am surprised at you failing at all," replied Father Sheen.

"My first failure was when I was a very young man. I need not give you the details of the affair. But I failed utterly. I was altogether inexperienced at the time, so I may be excused. For twenty years after that everything I touched succeeded. I was very careful, and I never attempted the impossible. Then I bungled another matter"

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I matched my wits with a fellow by the name of Lancaster. In some things I suppose I beat him, but in others, I, well I came off second best. That was not so

long ago ; and I made a vow that I would never be beaten again."

" Ah ! "

" You may guess, therefore, how I feel about this business. It is more serious than you can think."

" I am afraid it is all my fault," sighed the old priest.

" Pah, it was no longer your fault when I took the matter up. I promised that I would turn your failure into a victory for the Church, and instead, unless strong, definite action is taken, it will mean just the opposite. Not only has the Protestant remained a Protestant, but the girl will give up her faith, if the man is allowed to influence her."

" She has given up her faith ! " suggested Sheen.

" Nonsense."

" But, but——"

" My dear man, the faith is not given up so easily, it is woven into every fibre of her being, she is the child of many generations of Catholics. She still belongs to us."

" But her mother told me that——"

" Oh yes, yes, I understand. I've made a mess of it, but I am not quite in my dotage. She is a woman, and she is a *young* woman. She has been brought up in an atmosphere of spiritual authority, her mother remains true, and exercises control. Therefore she cannot cease to believe so easily. As far as she is concerned, it is only a matter of careful, skilful management."

Father Sheen looked doubtful.

" It is the man about whom I am most troubled. We have no hold upon him. I made up my mind that he should be converted, I promised you that he should be, and—and well, I'd move heaven and earth rather than be beaten."

" I don't think you understand Alizon."

"No."

"I don't. I am afraid—oh, I *am*—I'm not sure that Alizon will not—not marry Rutland."

Ritzoom took no notice of the other's words; evidently he regarded them as unworthy of an answer.

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked the old priest rather testily.

"I am going to have a conversation with Alizon."

"Yes, and then?"

"I shall call on Rutland."

"He is not in England."

"But he soon will be. He'll find out where the girl is, and then——" Ritzoom shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, suppose you fail with them?"

"I shall not fail, at any rate with Alizon."

"But suppose you do."

"Well, then, my friend," and Ritzoom's eyes flashed dangerously, "if that happens, you will see some——" but he did not complete the sentence.

"When are you going to see Alizon?"

The Jesuit looked at his watch.

"To-night," he answered, like a man who had made up his mind to undertake a difficult task.

"Then we must start at once."

"Yes, at once."

"Shall I call a cab?"

"No, we will walk. And I have a request to make of you."

"What is that?"

"Do not speak to me as we walk to the Priory, unless I speak to you first."

The two men started on their journey. After they had walked a few minutes, Ritzoom stopped.

"Did I not tell you?" he said.

They were standing opposite Tudor Chapel, which

loomed large in the dim light, and cast a dark shadow on the street.

"What?" asked Sheen, "I see nothing but Rutland's church."

"Don't you see that announcement?"

Leaning against one of the huge pillars which supported the portico was a notice board, on which the announcement was made. The old priest put on his spectacles and read it.

"A 'welcome home' meeting next Saturday night," he said. "Evidently his church officers know when they may expect him."

Ritzoom did not reply, but walked quietly on. No other word was spoken until they reached the door of the Priory. Father Sheen had obeyed his orders.

Lady Neville received the two men with cordiality, but there was an anxious look in her eyes.

"Thank you for coming so promptly," she said, "I want a quiet chat with you very much. As you may imagine, I am sorely troubled."

"Yes," replied Ritzoom, "we had better have a private interview at once."

He uttered the word "private" with such emphasis that Father Sheen expressed a desire to go into the library and read the *Times*.

"Will you give me a detailed account of all that happened in Rome?" said the Jesuit, when the two were seated in Lady Neville's private sitting-room. "Please omit nothing. The merest trifle may be of importance."

"I will tell you all I can remember," replied Lady Neville, and forthwith she described faithfully what had happened.

"Were Rutland and your daughter much alone?" asked Ritzoom when she had finished.

"Very little. He sometimes appeared desirous of avoiding her company."

Ritzoom looked grave. "That suggests that he tried to be true to his conceptions of honour," he said.

"As you know, I tried to make him feel that we were his friends, and until that last night—well, I could find no fault with him."

"It seems that this Bambino was the first occasion for definite doubt on her part?"

"Yes. I was ill at the time. I have explained. She said that people believed in the image without sufficient evidence, and this led her to think of other things. Presently she came to the conclusion that many of our beliefs were accepted in practically the same way."

"You say she got hold of a copy of a Protestant Testament?" queried the priest.

"Yes."

"You never detected signs of doubt before you went to Rome?"

"Never. And that in spite of the fact that I had allowed her to read widely. I have always maintained that our religion courted the freest investigation, and so she was allowed to read everything, except those books absolutely forbidden by the Church."

"And many that are, I expect," said the priest.

"Perhaps so. Still Father Sheen never——"

Ritzoom interrupted her with an impatient gesture.

"Sheen is refreshingly innocent of all knowledge concerning such things," he said presently, with an indulgent smile.

"Still, she never betrayed doubt. Indeed, she felt angry towards those who professed liberal ideas."

"Exactly; nevertheless, she was influenced. Her reading formed a sort of deposit in her mind, although she was

ignorant of its influence. I see, I see. One cannot be too careful as to what such as she reads."

"We had a terrible scene after Rutland left us that night, simply terrible. I could not have believed that she could have conceived such terrible heresy. She said that Romanism was not religion at all, and that its teaching was entirely wanting in the essentials of Christianity."

Ritzoom looked very grave.

"She still obeys you?" he queried presently.

"Yes," replied her ladyship doubtfully.

The priest understood perfectly the affirmative answer, as well as the tone in which it was spoken.

"What are you prepared to sacrifice?" he asked presently.

"Anything, everything."

"That is well."

"You would not consent to her marrying Rutland?"

"I would rather see her dead."

"That is well," repeated the priest with a satisfied smile.

"Do you think she would disobey your direct commands?"

"No, I think not. She has always been a good girl, and in spite of her apostacy, I am sure she loves me as much as ever."

"Do not call it apostacy, Lady Neville. I do not regard it in that light. Most children have childish complaints, but we do not think of them seriously; they get over them. Let us say that your daughter has an attack of spiritual measles. I do not think the attack is serious, and I can assure you she will get over it."

"You have not seen her, Father Ritzoom; you have not spoken to her since she came from Rome."

"No, but I do not think it matters. I fancy I understand the situation."

Lady Neville looked at the Jesuit keenly. For a moment she doubted his powers. His very confidence, while

cheering her, made her afraid that he did not understand her daughter's disposition, or character. Moreover, she could not help remembering that it was through Ritzoom that Duncan and Alizon had been thrown together. It was at his instigation that they had visited Rome, rather than some other Continental city. Up to the present nothing that he had prophesied had come to pass, rather, events had taken place which threatened to darken the rest of her life.

"What do you intend to do?" she asked presently.

"I cannot tell you exactly until I have had an interview with your daughter," replied Ritzoom. "But you need not be afraid. Your daughter will soon be ashamed of her fancy for Rutland, and she will bitterly repent her momentary doubts."

"I am very glad you think so," replied Lady Neville.

"I should like to see her at once," said Ritzoom; "the sooner we take action the better."

"Very well, I will send for her immediately," and she rung for a servant.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE PRIEST AND THE WOMAN

WHEN Ritzoom and Alizon were left together, the former looked somewhat ill at ease. As he told Father Sheen, he had been dealing with difficult cases for a quarter of a century, and having interviews with men and women on very delicate matters. As a rule, moreover, he felt perfectly at ease, even when skating over thin ice, and when engaged in matters which the slightest false move would destroy his plans. On this occasion, however, in spite of what he had said to Lady Neville, he did not feel certain of his ground. Although Alizon's face was very pale, and her lips trembled somewhat, her eyes shone with a steady light, while her features were set and determined. Somehow, she was different from what she had been when they had met before. He did not feel sure of his power over her, as in the past. Still he was not a man who would easily lose his self-control, or be likely to make false moves.

"Well, you have escaped a good deal of our English winter, my child," he said quietly. "I had hoped to have gone to Rome myself this winter; but the fates forbade it. Besides, I was doubtless doing better work in England. And, after all, nothing gives one so much satisfaction as hard work. Sometimes when I am overworked, I think I

should like to take my ease ; but that is only for a brief time."

Alizon simply nodded. She knew that she had not been asked to meet him to hear this, and she wished that he would at once approach the subject which brought them together.

But Ritzoom was too wise to do this, even although he guessed what was passing in Alizon's mind. He knew that his first business was to try and create a certain atmosphere, and to impress the girl with his presence. And so for the next few minutes he talked pleasantly about some of his experiences in Rome, and in other parts of the world—experiences which impressed the girl with the man's own cleverness, and with the apparently impregnable position of the organisation to which he belonged. All the time, moreover, he kept his great dark eyes upon her face, watching every twitch of the eyelids, and every tremor of the lips, just as a skilful diplomatist does when trying to find out the weak place in the armour of his opponent. He seemed to wield a kind of mesmeric power too, a power which influenced Alizon in spite of herself.

She felt, too, that he was drawing the net of the conversation slowly around her, and by subtle inference made her feel the heinousness of opposing the will of God as expressed in His Church. The atmosphere became more and more charged with priestly influence, and he impressed her with the idea that he spoke not simply as a man, but as an ambassador of a great mystical power. She could not explain why, but he made the last few weeks seem as a dream, he aroused old influences, old memories. He made her think of the long line of Nevilles on her father's side of her house, who had been true to the ancient faith, and of the equally long line of Bartons, of which her mother was a descendant, who had all been faithful to the Church. She

remembered, moreover, the boast of both the Nevilles and of the Bartons, that they, through the stress of the centuries, in spite of changes of kings and governments, in spite of war and persecution, had never married into Protestant families, never changed in their attitude towards religion. Ritzoom said nothing about these things, but he made her feel them, nevertheless, and thus the influences of heredity, of association and history, became working forces in the girl's life.

And so, at length, it seemed natural that he should refer to the plans to which she had been a party, as though she were still interested in winning a man who had been a dangerous antagonist to the servants of God, to become a champion of the true faith.

"It seems we have not been altogether successful, my child," he said confidentially, keeping his eyes fixed upon her; "well, that is all the more reason for renewed effort, for unflagging service in the cause of truth."

He did not appear to regard her own change as worthy of notice, rather he seemed to look upon her as faithful to her old ideals, and of being filled with the longings which possessed her six months before.

Alizon did not answer; indeed, at that moment she could not. He seemed to place a weight upon her lips and upon her heart.

"You were with Mr. Rutland a good deal in Rome?" he asked.

"Yes; but scarcely ever alone. Father Matthew accompanied us on the few occasions on which I went sight-seeing with him."

"Oh yes, I suppose so. And yet you must have noticed how he was impressed, you must have noticed how Rome influenced him?"

"Yes."

"Of course you did. Well, it appears that up to the present he has not yielded to the truth, and grace has not yet touched his heart. What would you advise now? What can we do to save his soul, and make him a champion for the truth? It will be a glorious victory, will it not?" and Ritzoom's voice became, if possible, more gentle, and for the first time Alizon noticed a tone of pleading.

"You do not appear to understand," she said, as if struggling with herself.

"Oh yes, I think I do," he replied, "I know there are difficulties, but, as you know, we never give up hope. We go on year after year, decade after decade. Besides, you have great influence over him. You must have. Well, it is for you to use it for God and His Church."

"Mr. Rutland will never be converted to your faith," stammered Alizon.

"You should never say that, my child. Your fathers never gave up hope, even in the darkest hours. Besides, the greater the difficulties the greater the reward."

"But, but——" Alizon struggled to say.

"We never admit of 'buts,'" interrupted Ritzoom, with a smile, "never. We all had before us a glorious ideal. We arranged to fight a bloodless battle. We determined to win over a dangerous enemy and make him a friend. Well, so far we have failed; but we must not give up. That would be cowardly, unworthy of the children of the Church. And, my child," here Ritzoom's voice became more solemn, more impressive, "God expects it of you. He is looking on us now. He is pleading with you, and yet commanding you never to turn aside from such a glorious object. And it is a TERRIBLE, TERRIBLE thing to disobey God."

For a moment Alizon felt almost overcome. The man, more than his words, made her as weak as a child. She almost lost her mental balance, and a great longing came

into her heart to fall on her knees before him and beg forgiveness. It seemed as though her very life hung in the balance, and as though priestly power and the influence of past centuries would be greater than all else. It was an awful battle that she fought, all the more awful because her strength seemed gone, and because the very foundations of her life were shaken.

Ritzoom saw his advantage, and he kept his eyes fixed steadily upon her. He was fighting a great battle, too. He knew that his own suggestion had brought around the present condition of things, and he was anxious for the sake of his promises, his influence, and his reputation, to undo the evil which had been done. Besides, he was, doubtless, sincere in what he had said. He had been reared in the atmosphere of the Church, and he loved that Church beyond all else. He believed in its Divine rights, he had no doubt but that it was the true, the only Christian Church. He could not be called a spiritual Catholic, but he was a loyal one. It appealed to his own nature, and satisfied its cravings, and because all the forces of his life had intensified his interests in its welfare, he could not see how those outside its fold could understand true religion. To a Protestant this may be strange, but to the Romanist, it is natural, nay, more, it is inevitable, it is the natural outcome of Papacy.

And thus Alizon stood shivering on the brink of begging forgiveness for what seemed at that moment a sin, she appeared about to yield to the influences which were around her. Then her strong, vigorous nature asserted itself, the life-blood of her intellect began to flow, the intuitions of her soul were made manifest.

She rose to her feet, and as she did so, a great weight seemed to roll from her. Life, in a second, became larger, religion appealed to her again, not as the acceptance of the

creeds of a Church, and the promise of obedience to its commands, but a new spirit, a spirit which she had herself felt. It was the realisation of those great words of Christ, "I came that ye might have LIFE, and that ye might have it more abundantly."

"It is no use my keeping back what you perhaps already know," she said firmly. "Mr. Rutland will never become converted to your faith; and I cannot assist you in such an object, because I no longer believe in those things which I formerly held fast."

"You cannot mean this, my child," said Ritzoom, like one surprised.

"I do mean it," replied Alizon, strength and conviction coming back with every word she spoke. "Religion is no longer what it was to me."

"If what you say is true, it cannot be," said Ritzoom. "But I cannot believe it; you are a child of the Church, and you cannot give up truth for error. You cannot leave that one true Church to become a mere sectarian."

"No, I do not leave the Church," replied Alizon, "rather, I more truly enter it."

"My child, what you say is impossible, there is no Church outside the Holy Catholic Church. Where is this Church that you speak about?"

"It is everywhere where there are loving faithful hearts,"

"This is foolishness," replied Ritzoom. "What you say is but the groundless phraseology of heretics."

"It is not groundless," cried the girl. All fear was gone now, and she spoke freely.

"Where is your authority?" asked the priest.

"I have the highest authority," replied Alizon. "'The Kingdom of God is within you,' Christ said."

"Ah, I see!" and there was a touch of asperity in his voice, "you have been reading the New Testament."

"I have been reading but little else for a long time," cried the girl.

"It is one of the most profound books in the world," said Ritzoom; "but it cannot be interpreted except by God's chosen ones. You are but a child, and would you pretend to know its meaning more truly than the elect of the Church who have given it to the world, and who have been studying it for eighteen hundred years?"

"Our Lord said that God hid many things from the wise and the prudent, and revealed them unto babes," said the girl.

"But what can you know of the New Testament, its history, and its deepest meaning?" asked the priest.

"I know enough to read and to pray," she replied, "and because I have accepted Christ rather than a Church, life has become new to me. It is more, it is greater, it is holier."

"I see," said Ritzoom, "I suppose you will be soon of the opinion that we of the Catholic faith do not belong to the true Church?"

"All who know Christ belong to the true Church, whether Catholic or Protestant," replied the girl. "The true Church is the Spirit of Christ reigning in our lives."

"Who told you this?"

Alizon was silent.

"But think, my child. Christ came to establish a Church. You believe that?"

"Yes."

"Well, where is it except in the Catholic Church?"

"It is everywhere, where there is love, and faith, and obedience," said Alizon. "It is not narrowed by sects or boundaries of any sort. It embraces all those who love Christ and accept Him as their Saviour."

"Let me show you where you are wrong," said the priest.

"You may adduce arguments which I cannot meet with

argument," answered the girl, "for you are cleverer than I. But—I know it seems boastful—I have knowledge which has not come to me through the intellect, and I know that the Church of Christ is larger than the Roman Church, and that in claiming to be the only Church, it limits God, it resolves religion into a mere sect. Christianity is a spirit, a great motive power in the soul; it is Christ living in us."

"And how came you by this knowledge?" asked the priest.

"I do not know," replied Alizon reverently. "I feel like the blind lad must have felt, to whom our Lord gave his sight, and who answered Christ's enemies by saying, 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.'"

Ritzoom was for a moment staggered. Alizon had led the conversation into a channel with which he was not familiar. The calm assurance of the girl gave him the impression that she regarded him as being ignorant of the great truths which had become her's.

"My child," he said, "while this seems very plausible and beautiful, it is in reality full of deceit. God has appointed certain means whereby men must be saved. That means is expressed in the Church."

"Who said so?" said Alizon quickly. "Give me our Lord's authority for saying this?"

"That could be easily given," said the priest, "but you would not understand. It is for you to obey those whom God hath appointed. And let me say this"—here Ritzoom's voice became rather angry—"it is no light matter for a child of the Church to disobey her teaching."

"Will you explain?"

"I mean this: Protestants may be forgiven, for their sin is that of ignorance; they have been robbed of religion, they have not been reared in the light of truth; but for one who has known the truth, who has lived amidst all the

advantages of the Church, who has received her sacraments, and yet who becomes apostate, I know of no forgiveness."

"Then you mean to say——"

"I mean to say that your position is terrible," said Ritzoom, "more terrible than you can think. Reflect, my child, reflect."

"I have reflected," said Alizon, "and God has told me that your words are false. What! Do you mean to say that God will punish me for ever, for following His own leadings, for being true to what I believe to be truth, for obeying the commands of our Lord? Father Ritzoom, whatever I once believed, I could not believe it now! It is repugnant to everything high and holy."

"Nevertheless, it is true."

"When you can make me believe that the sun causes darkness, you may persuade me to accept that," said the girl. "No, I do not fear the threats of the Church. All that is gone!"

Again Ritzoom felt baffled. He could not appeal to her fears. She had thrown off the weight of authority. She seemed to possess convictions, assurances, secrets unknown to him. He had appealed to two forces in her nature, and had failed. But he had not been a student of human nature during twenty-five years for nothing. So far she seemed to present an impregnable barrier to him, but he felt sure that he could find the vulnerable place in her armour. The quiet conviction of the girl, which his priestly authority failed to touch, staggered him, but he knew that she had a loving, affectionate nature.

"If you will not yield to the pleadings of the Church, I assume that you are not dead to love and to filial duty," he said. "Do you know what you are doing? You are breaking your mother's heart, you are blighting her life. Does your new religion teach you to do that? You know

that she is not strong, and if you persist in your madness, fear the worst ; you will be guilty of your mother's death."

Ritzoom had fixed his arrow at last. Alizon burst out sobbing, and, seeing his advantage, Ritzoom pressed it. He pictured Lady Neville's joy if they were again united in sympathy and faith, he told of her agony if she, Alizon, should persist in her terrible course. Perhaps he was not wise in saying so much, for presently Alizon's eyes flashed defiance.

"Father Ritzoom," she said, "suppose my mother was a Protestant instead of a Catholic, and had the same feelings towards Catholicism as she has towards Protestantism ; and suppose that her daughter was converted to Catholicism, would you have me remain a Protestant because by becoming a Catholic I broke her heart ?"

"That—that would be different," stammered Ritzoom ; "surely you cannot place the——"

"Excuse me," said the girl, interrupting him for the first time ; "it is no use, I love my mother more than words can say ; but I must be true to my convictions, I cannot act a lie."

"And this man ?" said Ritzoom, "this man who has been the means of leading you into error, will you persist in your madness concerning him ?"

"Father Ritzoom," said Alizon, "for the sake of what I once believed, I have told you of the new life which has come to me. But I decline to speak with you concerning Mr. Rutland. Good-night."

The Jesuit sat for a long time in perfect stillness. Presently a look of conviction came into his eyes. He had thought of a new method of action.

"Yes ; that will do it," he said with a smile.

CHAPTER XXXIV

RUTLAND'S HOME-COMING

“**W**HAT we need, Lady Neville, is time.”

Her ladyship looked doubtful as Ritzoom spoke. She had come to see, in spite of the Jesuit's assurances, that he had not truly estimated her daughter's character, had not realised that her whole life had been completely changed.

“You may be right ; but what then ?”

“With time I believe everything will come right, only——” he hesitated a second.

“Only what ?”

“Well, we must understand the case, and face it boldly. Your daughter has doubtless become unsettled.”

“Yes,” admitted her ladyship with a sigh.

“And she is in love with this—Rutland.”

Lady Neville was silent.

“What we must do at all hazards is to restore your daughter to the faith.”

“Oh, if we can !”

“And, of course, we must destroy all possibility of a marriage between the two.”

“Yes ; but do you realise the difficulties ? I am afraid you do not understand Alizon. She is very affectionate, but she cannot be driven. She will do what she believes

right, even if it means her death. A few months ago, I believe she would have died for our faith ; and now—well, I believe she would rather die than give up what she now believes. She laughs at the threats of our Church, or rather she treats them with quiet contempt. She seems to regard them much as an educated person regards the threats of a witch or a wizard. I cannot understand it. As far as Rutland is concerned she is inexorable ; all my pleadings about the differences in their position do not move her one jot."

"All that may be true ; and yet can we not fulfil our purposes through Rutland ?"

"But how ?"

"Well, it is a matter of time."

"Time ! but how will time help ? Alizon will soon be of age, and she will do whatever she believes to be right."

"And she loves this man ? I mean, do you think it will last ?"

"I am afraid it will. She is no giddy child, and she has never shown the slightest preference for any man before. And—why, think of it ! If Alizon were to marry this Protestant minister here in Lynford, I—I think I should go mad ! The papers would be full of it, the town would reek with gossip. Besides, think of it—my only child, a dissenting minister's wife !"

"It would be terrible, terrible !" said Ritzoom, like one musing. "Still I have hopes."

"But do not buoy me up with false hopes," cried her ladyship. "You see," she went on excitedly, "you thought her change of faith was only a passing whim, and that you could soon bring her to reason. But you were mistaken."

"I do not admit that," said Ritzoom, "and——" he hesitated for a second. "What is your real opinion of Rutland ?" he added.

"I have nothing against him personally. He is well conducted and gentlemanly. But for one episode, which, I suppose, he could defend, he has acted honourably."

"You know nothing of his antecedents?"

"Nothing except what he has told me," and Lady Neville related the purport of what Duncan had said about himself months before.

"He has had no love affairs before he came to Lynford, I suppose?"

"I don't know; but don't think about that. I could not bear any Adelphi drama plots to be associated with Alizon."

"And I desire none, Lady Neville; still it seems to me our battle must be fought through him."

"How?"

"He struck me as having a high sense of duty."

"I should say he would try to do what he believed to be right."

"Do you not think he would do a great deal, to win your consent for Alizon to become his wife?"

"Yes; but I could never give it."

"Not if he were a Catholic?"

"Perhaps; I don't know. But what is the use of speaking of that? It is impossible."

"Nothing is impossible. I do not give up easily."

"Yes, but surely if his contact with Rome and its teachers could not change him, he will not yield now. Remember he had given up all hope of winning Alizon. Had she not spoken—all would have been different."

"Was not that a ruse?"

"No, he is truthful and sincere, whatever else he may be. But, oh, Father Ritzoom, do think of some way out of this terrible affair."

"Lady Neville, will you give me *carte blanche* in this matter?"

"I do not understand?"

"Will you allow me to manage everything? To say what I think wise, to make promises in your name?"

"What promises?"

"I do not know, but only such promises as may be for your happiness, for Alizon's eternal salvation, and for the glory of our Church. Will you trust me fully?"

Lady Neville was silent.

"Without that I can do nothing. You see, I may have to take quick, decided action, action which you may not understand. The situation is desperate, and if not managed wisely will become deplorable, fatal. Believe me, I will not dream of sullyng the honour of your name, rather I will try and save it. I believe I can. But no one can act without perfect trust. Have you sufficient confidence in me to give me an entirely free hand to deal with Rutland?"

"But he is not in England."

"He soon will be. I see that the Tudor congregation have arranged to give him a welcome home the day after to-morrow. Unless we are careful they will soon be arranging to give a welcome to Alizon as the minister's wife."

"Oh, do something, Father Ritzoom!"

"You trust me, then, trust me fully? You give me authority to act in your name?"

"Yes, yes, but remember that Alizon is my only child, that she is as dear as my life to me."

"I will remember that."

A little later Ritzoom and Father Sheen walked back to the latter's house. As they passed Tudor Chapel Ritzoom read the bill, announcing Rutland's home-coming, very carefully, but he spoke no word to his companion.

"Have you done anything, settled anything?" asked the

simple old parish priest again and again, as they walked homeward, but Ritzoom made no reply; he was thinking deeply of the task which lay before him.

"If I failed with Alizon, I succeeded with Lady Neville," thought the Jesuit as he went to bed. "I led up the conversation in such a way that she was unable to refuse me."

Throughout the whole of the next day he did not leave the house, neither did he exchange confidences with his brother priest. He had work to do that was both delicate and difficult, and he determined to take no false steps.

"The initial difficulties will be the greatest," he concluded, after formulating his plans. "If I can once overcome them, I can begin to weave my web around him, and then——"

"It must be done too," he continued thinking, after pacing the room for some time. "The child must be saved from such a fatal step, and the Church must be defended. Yes, that's it. I feel like Cardinal Wiseman in that respect; I never cared for anything but the Church, and for it I would gladly give my life. But I wonder how it is that Alizon, a child of many generations of faithful Catholics, should, should—but there! I must heal the breach, I must heal the breach!"

On the Saturday evening Ritzoom wended his way towards Tudor Chapel. What his purpose was in doing this no one knew. Indeed, Father Sheen, simple-minded, pure-hearted old man that he was, felt very much hurt at the Jesuit's behaviour. Having great faith in his power, however, the good old priest uttered no word of expostulation. Ritzoom was dressed as an ordinary layman, so he passed into the chapel without notice. Besides, no one knew him in Lynford. During his visits in the town he had

always acted in a private capacity, and had taken care not to draw any attention towards himself.

The huge building was filled with people, even although it wanted ten minutes before the time announced for the meeting to commence. On nearly every face was a look of pleasing expectation, and all eyes were turned towards the vestry door.

All around the priest, men and women were talking in subdued tones, but loud enough for him to understand their conversation. He found that Rutland was their sole topic.

"Hast a seen 'im?" said one.

"Noa, but oo's coom. Aar George William were spaikin' to th' station-master, and oo said as aa oo coom laast neight."

"Yi, and how did a look?"

"Aw doan know. It wur dark. Eh, but I shall be reight glad to hear the sound on 'is voice agean. Oo's a gradely lad."

"Yi, oo is 'n all. Ther's niver been 'is like at Tudor afore. Hast a contributed?"

"Yi, a bit. Ther's fifty volumes, I suppose?"

"More nor that. Then theer's a watch, and a writin'-desk. Ay, but it wur a pleasure to give brass to buy things for him. Aw spoase th' committee 'ardly knowed what to git. I hear as aa ther's no likelihood on his gettin' wed, and soa they couldn't buy things for a house."

"I've 'eard ther' was no trouble i' gittin' brass."

"Noa. They got more nor they wanted. Ay, God bless 'im, but oo's a rare un. Ay, time's up, ther's clock strikin', look, and oo's comin'!"

Ritzoom looked at the vestry door and saw Rutland come into the chapel and walk up the rostrum stairs, accompanied by some of the officers of the church. When the young

minister appeared, the whole audience, numbering nearly two thousand people, rose *en masse* to cheer him. As it was afterwards remarked, never was such a sight seen in Lynford before. A great wave of emotion passed over the great congregation; old men with weather-beaten faces wiped away the tears which they could not suppress, old motherly women shouted out their welcome, young men and maidens cheered lustily, while all over the great church were heard expressions of gladness and thankfulness.

The meeting was an utter surprise to the young man. He knew nothing about it until a few hours before it commenced, and even then he had no idea that it would assume such dimensions. As the crowd welcomed him, he felt so touched, so overcome by the manifestation of their love, that the tears welled up into his eyes, and a sob rose in his throat which could not be suppressed.

The senior church officer gave out a hymn, in which the great congregation joined. How the sound rose and swelled! Perhaps there are few parts of the country which are more noted for singing than Lancashire, and as nearly two thousand voices joined in the grand old hymn, "All hail the power of Jesu's name," it was difficult to describe the impression made.

To Ritzoom it came as a revelation. He did not understand the mental and spiritual outlook of the people, he did not realise the religious convictions of the sturdy sons of the north. Here were people who had cast aside all priestly claims, and who yielded to no religious authority save that of Christ Himself, and yet they were loyal to His ambassador. Here were men and women who confessed their sins to none but God, who trusted only to Him for the consciousness of forgiveness, and yet they rejoiced in their faith, and had no doubts about its reality. They claimed perfect liberty,

mental and religious, and yet they were sober, law-abiding, God-fearing people. It was such as they who had made the nation great, and it was such as they who made it impossible for the priest to gain any footing in the country.

The whole gathering presented a problem to the subtle-minded Jesuit; he was ignorant of the forces which it suggested, ay, and ignorant of the sturdy independence which formed the basis of the people's character.

He took everything in at a glance, and tried to understand the significance of what he saw. It made his task more difficult, but it made his victory more glorious if he should accomplish it. Oh, if he could only convert Rutland, and if he could only bring his people into submission to the Church! Well, and if he did, would they be happier, stronger, more God-fearing than they were?

The singing was followed by prayer: simple, earnest, sincere. Again the Jesuit was impressed. For a simple layman to lead the prayers of the people in their own language, without appeals to saints, or apostles, or the Virgin! It was all strange, very strange.

Throughout the meeting he sat listening and taking note of everything. He heard the old gray-headed leaders of the Church, as well as the young men just beginning to bear the burdens of life, testify to their affection for Rutland, and welcome him back with heartfelt warmth. He heard them praise him for upholding the faith, and defending the liberties of the people. He listened to their prayers as they pleaded for his welfare, bodily, mentally, spiritually.

"The Church has an impossible task," he thought sadly. "These Nonconformists form more than half of the religious life of the country, and they will never yield."

Presently a presentation was made. A writing-desk, a large parcel of valuable books, a gold watch and chain, and

other articles were given him with the Church's love and the people's prayers.

"I have said that these things are given by Tudor Church," said the chairman, who happened to be Mayor of the town, "but I am not quite correct. People from almost every Church asked to contribute. Even Catholics, or those who used to be Catholics, are among the contributors. I am glad of this. It shows that the Church is broader than we think, and it shows how strongly our friend and minister has laid hold of our town."

When Rutland got up to reply there was the wildest enthusiasm. For several minutes he was unable to speak, and eventually, when the audience settled down to listen, his emotion almost overcame him. That great sea of kindly faces, those tear-dimmed eyes, those honest cries, "God bless tha' lad!" made speech almost impossible. He mastered himself presently, however, and was able to speak freely. He thanked them for their kindness, their generosity, their sympathy, their prayers, their love, and expressed the hope that he should in the coming days be able to prove himself worthy of it. He would not describe his experiences in Rome; perhaps, sometime soon, he would be able to give them a lecture, when he would be able to speak about them at length. And yet there was one thing he would like to mention in connection with Rome, which was in some degree associated with the controversy in which he took part some months before. "And it is suggested by the chairman's speech about 'the Church,'" he said. "We Free Churchmen are often sneered at because of our divisions, and at one time it was a painful problem to me. But the real meaning of Church has become more and more impressed upon me. As you know, the Romanists claim that theirs is the only Church, and they rest their claim upon certain so-called facts in

history, and a supposed long line of Apostolical succession. It is a very sad fact that a great mass of the young and educated life of Italy is drifting from religion altogether, and that Romanism fails, even at its headquarters, to meet the intellectual and spiritual life of young, free Italy. At the same time, great hosts of the people belong to the Church, the real Church ; because they love Christ, and are trying to be true to Him. On my way home I stopped at Berlin, where there is a strong Protestant spirit ; there, again, in spite of ignorance, unbelief, sin, is a great multitude belonging to the true Church, the Church of love and obedience to Christ. And the same is true here in Lynford. We have our different denominations, but we belong to the same Church, in so far as we love and serve our Lord.

“I know this seems like a platitude, but it has been made real to me during these last three months. Moreover, the great fact that the true Church of Christ is **ONE** has been made real. Of course, all those pagan trappings of priestcraft are foolishness, all that talk about the Church being confined to one organisation is worse than foolishness, but the *oneness* remains, it is a spirit of love and obedience, and that, thank God, in spite of ignorance, bigotry, and error, belongs to all the Churches. And this makes the Church so much greater than we imagine ; it oversteps all the barriers of men, it embraces all pure, loving hearts, it makes the Church **UNITED**, and it makes it **UNIVERSAL**. I shall continue to fight what I believe to be error, I shall still try and destroy all cramping, narrowing influences ; but I shall more than ever recognise the fact that the Spirit of Christ is everywhere, and wherever He is, the Church is. Indeed, I like to think of the words of that grand old father in the early Church, I mean St. Ignatius. He, when writing to the Smyrnæans, said, ‘ *Wherever Jesus Christ may be, there is the Catholic Church.* ’ ”

His words struck a new note in the meeting, and Ritzoom felt its power. It made the work he had set to accomplish more difficult still, but he did not deviate from his purpose.

It was very late before the meeting broke up, for Rutland had to shake hands with hundreds of people, but Ritzoom stayed to the end. When the church was nearly empty, he made his way to Rutland's side.

"Let me also welcome you back," he said with a smile. "I have been much struck with the gathering, and with your address, and I should like an hour's chat with you about it, and about other things."

"You are very kind," said Rutland; "but I am afraid I could not see you until to-morrow night, after my work is over."

"That will do splendidly. Shall I call at your lodgings about nine o'clock?"

"Yes," replied Rutland quietly. "I will arrange to meet you."

"Thank you very much. To-morrow night, then."

The priest walked through the town thinking deeply. "It is a difficult task," he said; "but I think I shall accomplish it."

CHAPTER XXXV

DUNCAN RUTLAND'S TEMPTATION

"WELL, and you enjoyed your visit to the Eternal City?" said Ritzoom with a pleasant smile.

"Enjoyed is scarcely the word," replied the young man, and he sat back in his arm-chair, while opposite him sat the Jesuit smoking a large cigar.

They were in Rutland's study on the Sunday evening as had been arranged. The young minister was rather excited. This was scarcely to be wondered at, for his work through the day had been very trying. Great eager crowds had filled the spacious building, and the young man's whole strength had gone out in the services. Moreover, he guessed the object of the priest's visit, and felt sure he would have some message from Lady Neville.

"Isn't it? Well, perhaps not. One enjoys a cigar, but scarcely a visit to Rome, that is, if one possesses the historical spirit; one is awed, bewildered, overwhelmed, but one does not 'enjoy' in the ordinary sense of the word."

Rutland waited for him to proceed.

"Of course you will have guessed that I had some definite purpose in this visit?" said Ritzoom after a short silence.

"Yes, I guessed that."

"Naturally. Well, there are two traits of my character

which are strongly marked. One is an utter frankness, and the other is a disposition to get at a point quickly."

Rutland nodded.

"Well, to be true to my character, I will be frank, and I will get to the point at once. I am sure this will be most pleasing to you as a straightforward Englishman."

The young man nodded, but remained silent.

"I will therefore be painfully blunt. You have, I am given to understand, become the suitor for the hand of our mutual friend, Miss Alizon Neville, and that she has been disposed to listen kindly to you?"

The young man flushed rather angrily. He did not relish the priest's interposition in the matter but he spoke no word.

"As a comparative stranger," went on Ritzoom, "I have personally no right to interfere with your privacy; but as you may know, I am honoured with Lady Neville's confidence, and—well, it has always been a pleasure for me to meet you."

"Thank you," replied Rutland quietly.

"I will be entirely frank," laughed Ritzoom almost nervously, "and I will confess that I hoped your visit to Rome would have led you to embrace our faith; but my hopes have not been realised."

"No, if you hoped that, they have not been realised; they never will."

"That is a pity. Lady Neville's objections might be overruled then."

Rutland looked up inquiringly.

"Yes, I repeat it. Personally, mind you, I should rejoice in such an union. I am not influenced by English prejudices. I believe in the aristocracy of intellect, the aristocracy of worth, but we don't all see alike, do we?"

"No, we don't all see alike."

"And so I have come to see whether we cannot arrange this matter. We are men, and we are both broad-minded enough to see the value of compromises. One of your sceptical philosophers seems to think that compromise is the basis of civilisation."

"What compromise are you thinking of?"

"I am interested in Miss Neville too," went on Ritzoom, without noticing Rutland's question. "Her ladyship is very bitter, and will hardly listen to reason. It would be a terrible sorrow to me to know that the poor child was disinherited, and sent away from home. You have been often enough to the Priory to know that under no circumstance would Alizon do what her ladyship forbade her; but even a negative disobedience will, unless matters can be arranged, end in the poor girl's life being utterly wrecked. She has been tenderly reared, she has been surrounded by refinement and luxury, and so to be deprived of everything that must be dear to the heart of such an one would be terrible, and I would like to avoid such a calamity if possible."

"Am I to understand, then," said Rutland, roused to speak by Ritzoom's words, "that Lady Neville——"

"Will certainly disinherit her if she persists in disobedience. And—well, even if you were to—well, carry out the plans which have suddenly formed themselves in your mind, it would be terribly cruel to drag her from the Priory, in order that she might share with you the pleasures of a cottage."

"How do you know what is in my mind?" said Rutland, suddenly thrown off his guard.

"I have an unfortunate habit of arriving at conclusions very quickly," was the reply; "still they are seldom wrong. As a matter of fact, however," he went on, after hesitating

a second, "although I am an avowed celibate, I have great sympathy with lovers. At the same time I am sure you will agree with me when I say that it would be taking a mean advantage of a young girl's weakness to alienate her from her mother, to cause her to be disinherited, and to drag her into poverty. For myself I know nothing more contemptible than to do such a thing, and I am sure you would scorn to be a party to such a proceeding."

"I presume you have something to suggest," remarked Rutland presently.

"Yes," replied Ritzoom, "I have, and I feel sure you will see the reasonableness of my proposals. You see, I wish to do two or three things. I wish, first of all, to save Alizon from being driven from her home, and I wish to make both of you happy. This, you will understand, cannot be done unless we adopt a course agreeable to Lady Neville."

"Well, tell me what you wish to say?"

"I need not remind you that you are a Protestant, and that Lady Neville is a Catholic. Now, while, in time, her ladyship may become reconciled to the thought of her daughter marrying a Protestant, she would never consent to her marrying a Protestant minister."

"I see."

"You will see that such an arrangement would be absurd; indeed, her ladyship, with her antecedents, and her loyalty to the Church, would rather see her daughter dead than such a thing should happen."

"Well?" Rutland's face was set and stern, his eyes shone with an angry light.

"You see that. Well, the proposal I am authorised to make is thus: You resign Tudor Church, and study for another profession, say the Bar. With your previous education and training you will be able to pass the necessary examinations very quickly. Then when you are

entitled to plead at the bar her ladyship will be willing to listen to your proposal for her daughter's hand."

"And meanwhile?" Rutland asked the question as though it meant much to him.

"Meanwhile," answered Ritzoom, "her ladyship will not seek to prejudice her against you."

"But shall I be allowed to see her?"

"That would not be wise. You see, her ladyship is naturally anxious about the future of her only child; she is also desirous of being true to the commands of her Church. She regards the arrangement as a necessary probation for you both. You are both young, and your experiences have been, let us say, a little out of the ordinary. Therefore it should not be hard for you to wait a year or two. The strength of your affection would be tested, and her ladyship would be assured that you were willing to make sacrifices in order to gain an inestimable treasure. There, Mr. Rutland, you have the case in a nutshell, and I think you must admit that Lady Neville has been exceedingly lenient."

"But if I remain a Protestant minister?"

"Then the case is hopeless. Even you can see that it would not be possible for her to consent to her daughter receiving the attentions of a Protestant minister."

"But if I persist, and—and if she persists?"

"In that case I think you would, to use an English colloquialism, 'cut your own throat.' Of this I am practically certain: she would not positively disobey her mother. That is to say, she will not do what her mother commands her not to do. But supposing she does. Supposing that you pressed your suit, and she married you, what would follow? You must cause the woman you love to be disinherited, for her ladyship would no longer own her as her daughter. More than that, you would

blight the lives of both mother and child. Her ladyship possesses the spirit of the old Roman matrons. She will do what she believes is right, but the evening of her life would be darkened, her home would be practically destroyed. You can see this. But not only would you curse her ladyship's life, you would curse her daughter's as well. How could she be happy while the memory of her disobedience haunted her? Why think of it. She would be taken away from all her refined associations; she who never knew want, would be haunted by poverty, she would constantly realise that she was alienated from home, and that she had blighted the life of the mother who bore her. I put it to you frankly, as man to man, would it not be a despicable action?"

"Have you Lady Neville's authority for saying this?"

"Yes, I have; that is, I have her authority for making this proposal which I submitted to you. Have I made everything plain?"

"Yes, I think so."

"You can, I hope, realise what a great concession it is on her ladyship's part. Indeed, I never thought she would have yielded so much."

"There is nothing more to say I suppose?"

"No, nothing. The issues are very simple, and I hope I may be able to congratulate you on deciding wisely."

"I hope so."

"Well, what do you say? What answer shall I take to her ladyship?"

"None at all—at present."

"Oh, well, there is no hurry; all the same, I thought you would have had no difficulty in deciding. You are not asked to change a single article of your faith, you are simply required to change one profession for another, and a far more desirable one. Why, think! The successful

barrister may rise to the highest position in the land. He may be a great advocate, or even a judge. He may go into Parliament and rise to be Chancellor of the Exchequer, or even to be Prime Minister. And with Lady Neville's influence, a baronetcy, or even a peerage, is not impossible. On the other hand, what has the Nonconformist ministry to offer a man of your ability and ambition? You can rise no higher than you have already risen. You are the minister of the principal dissenting church in the town, and if you stay here for thirty years,—well, you can be no more. I think I speak as your friend, and I do not see how a sane man could reject the proposal I have made, and to which her ladyship has consented. You see this, don't you?"

"Yes, I see it."

"If you refuse—well, I see nothing but misery as the result. Whatever course events take, they must be calamitous; but I need not go over that ground again."

"No, you need not go over that ground again."

"Then you will consider my proposal?"

"Yes, I will consider it."

"When may your answer be expected?"

"I don't know—soon."

"Then I will go; good-night."

"Good-night."

"I've got him," thought Ritzoom, as he walked away from the house. "I've got him. He takes the bait. When that first great step is taken I shall be master of the situation, and I will guide matters in such a way that all my desires shall still be accomplished."

CHAPTER XXXVI

GOD, THE MAN, AND THE WOMAN

DUNCAN RUTLAND did not sleep throughout the whole night after Ritzoom had left him. He could not. He was again in the toils of a great temptation. He had thought when he had determined to leave Rome a few weeks before that he had fought his battle and won it; now, however, he realised that it was harder than ever. Then he did not know that Alizon loved him, his hopes of winning her were very weak; now all was different, and that difference made the struggle more painful. The cup of happiness had been lifted to his lips, he had tasted of its joys, and to have it dashed from him for ever seemed more than he could bear. What would life be to him without her? How could he bear to spend perhaps fifty years without having her by his side, knowing all the time she longed to be there?

He considered the whole situation again and again. He reviewed every possibility, and it seemed as though there was no alternatives save those which Ritzoom had set before him.

Hour after hour passed, and still he was under the Jesuit's influence; the cruel logic of his words constantly appeared before him, undermining his will and his power of resistance. For inclination, pleasure, ay, the happiness of a lifetime, lay in obedience to the priest's words.

Oh, it seemed so easy, so pleasant to yield, to swim with the tide, to live for love ! It was so hard, so terribly hard to follow that path which in spite of his reasonings, duty marked out for him !

For supposing he followed in the path of duty, would he not blight Alizon's life ? supposing he determined to be true to the commands of his conscience, and continued in the work in which he was engaged, what then ? Well, one of two things would happen. First, he would have to give up Alizon, and to try and wipe out her memory from the pages of his life. And what would that mean ? To him it would mean disappointed hopes, broken ideals, ay, it would mean a lifetime of weariness, of loneliness, of sorrow. He could not bear the thought of living his life without the presence of one who had become all the world to him ! Then the other alternative appeared. Supposing he pressed his suit, supposing he succeeded in taking her away from the home of the Nevilles, that she might become the wife of a Nonconformist minister ? Ritzoom was right, such an act would be cruelty, madness. How could Alizon, with her tastes, her education, her associations, be happy ? Besides, she would bring discord in her own home ; more, she would be disinherited, driven from home. She would be the subject of gossip for the whole town. His action would be misunderstood, and, possibly, his influence lessened. No, it would not be fair, it would not be manly to ask her to share his lot ; she would be happier away from him, she would have less to repent of if she remained amidst the associations of her old life, and in the sunshine of her mother's smile.

Then he thought of Ritzoom's suggestion. It offered such glowing possibilities. Yes, he could become a barrister, and a successful one too. He felt sure of it. And the profession offered such a glorious sphere for an

ambitious man ! He could make for himself a name that would ensure him a welcome in any home in England. As the Jesuit had said, there was but little probability of his rising any higher than he was at present, while he remained a Protestant minister, but at the English Bar—well, the horizon seemed boundless ! He thought of all the great names which had become household words in the land. And he could rise as they did. But that was only the least part of the prospect. He would be able to have Alizon as his wife, ay, and with her mother's sanction. And why not ? He could do good in his new life, as much as he was doing now. He could still preach the gospel, could still help the poor, ay, his position would give him new influence and greater opportunities for doing good. With Alizon by his side he could bring sunshine into thousands of lives, and at the same time he could fulfil the dream of his own life.

Yes, that was it, that was it. He would go to Lady Neville, he would tell her that for Alizon's sake he would resign his church, and adopt the course she had suggested.

But—but—and then all the other side appeared. Conscience spoke loudly, loyalty to duty became a greater, grander thing than the happiness of a lifetime.

When morning came the question was still unsettled. He rose as soon as it was light, and walked across the great wild moors which stretched away behind the house in which he lived. Again he prayed for strength as he had prayed before ; again he poured out his soul in wild cries to his Creator.

But the question of his heart was not answered.

In the afternoon he went through the town. How glad the people seemed to see him, to shake him by the hand, to speak a kindly word. Many of them were rough in speech, some a trifle coarse, but they were kind at heart, kind and

simple. He remembered the words which were spoken on the previous evening, and at the meeting on the Saturday. He thought of the expressions of their loyalty and their love. He saw again the great throngs of people who had crowded the building. Ah, he might become a greater man by being a barrister, he might occupy a more enviable position from the worldling's standpoint, but would he be a better man *in himself*? Did not Ritzoom's suggestion mean sacrificing his manhood?

At half-past five the machinery of the mills ceased, and thousands of weavers thronged the street. Scores of them, ay, hundreds, gave him a cheerful nod and a kind smile; some stopped him and told him how glad they were to see him back again in their midst.

Presently he saw old Matthy Bray and Jonas Dixon coming towards him.

"Ay, Mester Rutland," they said, "aw'm reight glad to see tha abaat agean. Yo're lookin' rare and brown, too. Tha mun tak' care o' thysen naa. We can noan afford for thee to laive us and go off to Rome. Tha mun stick to us naa."

"Do you really wish that I should?" asked the young man, with a wan smile.

"Wish," said old Jonas, "wish, lad? We needn't tell thee that. Saturday neight tould tha that, yi, and yesterday too. Us Lancashire folk are rough and ready; we say straight things, but we know when we like onybody. Ay, 't would be a blow for Tudor, ay, and for Lynford, too, if thaa wert obliged to laive us. But yo' wil'n't, mester, yo're better naa, aren't you?" and the old weaver looked into the young man's eyes with a look of affection.

"Oh yes, I'm much better; but not over strong yet!"

"No," said Matthy Bray, "tha wants some good Lancashire food to ait. Yo've 'ad a lot o' Italian rubbish,

an it's noan good for a civilised man. Yo' mun geet plenty of good Lancashire beef, and craim, and that sort o' thing. Things wi' a bit o' strengthenin' stuff in 'em.

"An' yo' mun noan work too 'ard. Tak' it aisy for a bit, lad, tak' it aisy. What we want is that tha sud geet wed. A nice Lancashire lass, wi' a bit o' brass. Ther's plenty i' Tudor, Mester Rutland, nice lasses an' oal. Geet wed and then thou'lt geet settled. Ay, but tha mun settle daan for life, lad. Tha mun noan laive Tudor, we're suited, and tha 'rt suited. Good-neight, mester."

The two weavers walked on, and presently he met more. It was the same everywhere. Rich and poor met him with smiles, and all gave him a word of welcome.

He felt himself to be mean and ungrateful. These people had showered kindness upon him, and yet he was contemplating leaving them—and yet—well, what should he do?

Days passed away, and still he came no nearer a decision. He had not seen Alizon, neither had he heard from her. He hungered for a message, and yet he dared not go near the Priory. He dared not go to places where he might possibly see her.

On the Thursday night Ritzoom paid another visit to his lodgings. He evidently came in the expectation of receiving Rutland's answer, but in this he was disappointed. The young man was still fighting his battle, a battle between love and duty, between pleasure and pain, and try as he might he could not make up his mind.

The Jesuit did not press him to state his intentions; he was too wise for that; but he strengthened the impression he had made on his previous visit; but many subtle suggestions he drew Rutland along that course which he intended he should take. For the priest had made his plans carefully, and he knew that when the young minister

had taken the first step he would be able to obtain a positive hold upon him, a hold which he did not intend to relax until his utmost wishes were fulfilled. He believed he had estimated Rutland's character correctly, and he knew the forces by which he would be governed.

But, as he had said to himself when on his way thither, he must first of all get the young man to cross the Rubicon, and burn his bridges, after that all would be well.

He did not get him to do this, however, for Rutland was not to be moulded like clay in the hands of the potter. He had an individuality of his own, he had a will, and he had a conscience. Thus, while he influenced him in the desired direction, he could make him take no step.

"Of course, you—you have seen no one from the Priory since your return to Lynford?" he said casually as he rose to take his leave.

"No."

"I thought not," and then he looked at Rutland as a skilled mesmerist looks at his victim.

"There is nothing wrong at the Priory, I hope?" said the young man, thrown off his guard for a moment.

"There are wet eyes there."

"Wet eyes! What do you mean?"

"Surely you can guess," said the Jesuit, as he left the house. "Good-night."

All through the night he thought of Alizon, and the memory of the priest's words haunted him. He interpreted them in a hundred ways, and every one of his interpretations made him long to yield to his heart's desire.

What should he do? What should he do? The question haunted him throughout the next day, and all the while he felt himself becoming weaker and weaker.

At nine o'clock that night he found himself alone fighting the same battle. He had just returned from a meeting, and

was now sitting in his lonely rooms. Oh, it was very, very weary, this continuous doubt, this continuous struggle! He could not bear it much longer. He felt sometimes as though he must yield to the conditions which Lady Neville had authorised the priest to make.

Presently he drew a chair to his study-desk, the desk which had been presented to him the previous Saturday evening. Yes, he would write that night and decide the question for ever. He took up a pen and wrote the date, then followed the words—"Dear Lady Neville"—

So far he got, and then he stopped. Could he resign Tudor Church, for that was what it meant, on the very desk the people had given him a few days before? On the other hand, could he give up Alizon for ever?

He took out his watch and looked at the time. It was the watch the Church had given him. He looked around the room and saw a number of books which told him of his duty. Oh, but he could not give up Alizon, and yet—

He heard a knock at the door. No one answered it. Evidently his landlady had gone for a few minutes' chat with a neighbour. The knock was repeated.

He went to the door, and on opening it saw a veiled figure, which he could not recognise in the darkness.

"Mrs. Nutter has gone out, I think," he said, "but I daresay she will be back in a few minutes."

"May I come in?"

Without a word he closed the door behind her and drew her into the room.

"Alizon!" he cried.

She took off her hat and veil and placed them on a chair, and then looked at him like one wondering.

"I have heard everything," she said.

"Your mother's conditions?"

"Yes."

He was silent. He did not ask her how she came, or why. She was there before him, and he felt that the great moment of his life had come.

"What are we going to do?" she asked.

He continued silent. Her presence made him long more than ever to yield to the conditions which had been made, and yet she quickened his sense of duty and of loyalty to what was right.

"Has he—Ritzoom told you of our meetings?" he asked presently.

"Yes, he has told me everything, told it as only he can tell."

He nodded.

"What are we going to do?" she asked again presently.

He caught her hand. "Oh, Alizon!" he cried, "it would be worse than death to—give you up."

"Would it?" and a bright light shone in the girl's eyes.

"Yes," he said, and she knew that he meant what he said.

They were both silent for a few seconds, for they knew not what to say.

"You must not give up your church," she said presently.

"Must I not?" His voice was hoarse, for Alizon's words sounded like a death-knell to his heart.

"No, it would be wrong," he said; "you must not lower your standard by adopting a poorer profession."

"No." He felt she was right, knew that her voice was as the voice of God.

"All those fine sayings about place, position, and power are as nothing," she said; "they cannot be entertained by those who believe as we do. We know the truth, and the truth has set us free."

He felt ashamed of himself. She was a convert of only a few weeks, and yet she taught him his duty.

"Then you have come to bid me goodbye," he said presently.

"What?" There was a sob in her voice as she uttered the word.

"You have come to bid me goodbye," he repeated. "Oh, I know what you say is right. I feel it more than ever now. But, oh, Alizon, it will be like death to part with you."

The girl looked at him with questioning, yearning eyes.

"Yes, like death," he repeated. "The thought that I must spend my life without you, month after month, year after year, and yet not to have you near me. O God, I cannot bear it!"

"Must you bear it?" and her voice trembled as she spoke.

"The man said there was no other way, and I feel that he is right. It would be mean of me to ask you to disobey your mother; it would be wrong of me to try and alienate you from your home, and cause you to be disinherited. Oh, I feel the meanness, the unmanliness of doing such a thing. And even if I thought you would consent I would not ask you. I have fought it all out, I know the bitterness, the remorse that would follow in the train of such an action, and yet—oh, Alizon, may God give us strength to bear it!"

"Is there no other way?" said the girl.

"No, I know no other. You have made me feel that I cannot cease being a minister, and I cannot ask you to sacrifice yourself."

"Then I must ask you, Duncan?"

He turned towards her with a startled, wondering look in his eyes.

"If you will not ask me, I must ask you," she repeated.

"God did not lead us to love each other to mock us. He did not open our eyes that we should live in darkness. I have been thinking too. I—I cannot believe that mother will remain for ever angry with me, she loves me too much for that. And even if she does—well, do you think I care so much for house and position and society and all that sort of thing—as to—oh, don't you understand?"

The young man sat like one dazed. He knew not what to say, or what to think.

"I should blight your happiness for ever, if—if——" but he stopped suddenly.

"And if you don't?"

"If—if I don't," he stammered.

"Yes, if you don't, what would my life be then?"

He did not speak a word.

"Can you refuse me, Duncan?" she said, looking into his eyes.

"No, I cannot. God forgive me, but I cannot," he cried, as he saw the light of her great love shining through her tear-dimmed eyes.

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